



THE LIBERTY "BOYS OF '76"

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

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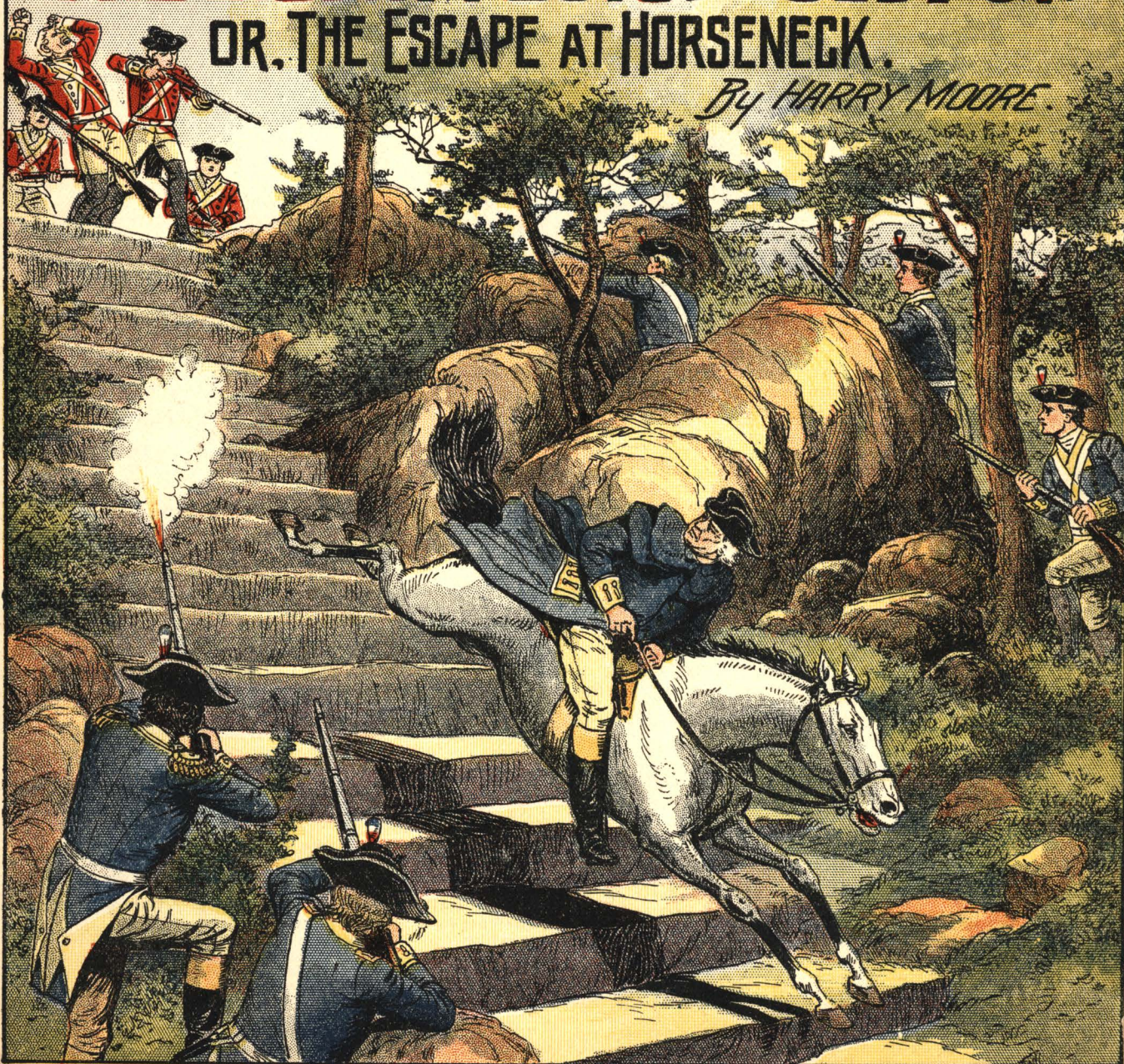
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Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS AND "OLD PUT." OR, THE ESCAPE AT HORSENECK.

By HARRY MOORE



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OR,

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CHAPTER I.

DICK AND BOB CAPTURED.

"Look, Dick!"

"Where, Bob?"

"Yonder."

"Ah, I see now."

Two handsome youths of perhaps nineteen years sat on horseback on the top of a hill not far from New Rochelle, in Westchester County, New York.

It was the evening of March 25, of the year 1779, and the War of the Revolution was in full blast.

These two youths were Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook. Both were members of a company of young fellows of about their own age, called "The Liberty Boys of '76," and Dick Slater was the company's captain.

The two were on their way to Reading, Connecticut, where General Putnam—"Old Put.," as he was familiarly called—was quartered.

General Washington had sent them, and they were the bearers of a verbal message to Putnam, as, where it was possible to do so, Washington preferred to send messages in this manner; then there was no danger of the messages being found, if the messengers were captured.

"What do you suppose it means, Dick?" asked Bob.

"I don't know," was the reply. "That is quite a strong force down there, isn't it?"

"Yes, there must be more than a thousand men."

"I should say there are at least fifteen hundred men in that force."

"Likely you are right."

The youths were looking down upon an encampment of the British.

"I'd like to know where they are headed for, Bob," said Dick, musingly.

"So would I."

"Perhaps they are headed for Reading, Bob."

"Ah, you think it possible they are going to try to capture Putnam?"

"It is possible."

"Well, if that is their intention we will spoil their plans."

"Yes; we'll make it impossible for them to take Putnam by surprise, at any rate."

"So we will. We'll stop right here, and await darkness, and when it comes, we will find out what the redcoats intend trying to do."

"I'm with you in that, Dick."

"Let's dismount."

The youths leaped to the ground.

Then they led their horses back into the timber a ways and tied them to trees.

Now we will go back and keep our eyes on the enemy, Bob."

"Yes, Dick."

They returned to the road, and selecting a spot from where it was possible to get a good view of the British encampment, they watched closely.

They were in hopes that a small party of three or four might wander away from the encampment; then they would slip up close to this party and try to hear what was talked about; in this way they might succeed in ascertaining the intentions of the British.

But they were disappointed. They did not see anyone leave the encampment.

Some had done so, however, while they were in the timber, tying their horses.

The party of British was under Governor Tryon, and it had happened that in sweeping the surrounding landscape with a telescope which he carried, he had caught sight of the two youths on horseback on the top of the hill.

He had at once summoned two or three of the officers, who took a look at the two horsemen.

"What do you think of them?" the governor asked.

"I don't know," replied one. "They may be rebel spies."

"Quite likely," said the governor. "You see, they wear no uniforms, and that stamps them as either loyalists or rebels. If they were the former, they would have come straight on down into our camp, I'm thinking, so that leaves it extremely probable that they are rebels, seeing they remain on the hilltop, watching us, and showing no inclination to come down here."

"They are dismounting," exclaimed one of the officers, who had the telescope to his eyes.

"Let me see," said Governor Tryon.

He took the telescope and looked.

"Yes, they have dismounted," he said, "and now they are leading their horses back into the timber."

"That looks suspicious!"

"So it does," the governor agreed. "It is my opinion that the two are rebel spies."

"Then they ought to be captured."

"So they ought; and I think I shall have the matter attended to at once."

"You are going to send a party to make the capture, sir?"

"Yes; and it will be a good plan for the party to start at once, before the two come forth from the timber."

"You are right; and then we can take them by surprise."

"Right; you take a party of ten men, Captain Sharp, and hasten up to the top of the hill and make prisoners of the young strangers."

"Very well, sir."

The officer quickly selected ten men and hastened away, succeeding in getting out of the encampment before Dick and Bob came forth from the timber, after tying their horses, so their departure from the camp was not seen by the "Liberty Boys."

The youths were standing there, talking in low tones and watching the British encampment, when they were suddenly startled by hearing swift-running footsteps.

The next instant they found themselves surrounded by about a dozen British soldiers, each with a pistol leveled full at the youth's heads.

The "Liberty Boys" realized that they were in danger of being made prisoners; but they did not let the fact that they were assailed by misgivings show in their faces.

They kept up a brave front, and stared at the redcoats with well-simulated surprise.

"Hello, this mean?" cried Dick.

"It means that you are our prisoners!" replied Captain Sharp, triumphantly.

"For what reason?"

"It is simple enough: Because you are spies."

"Oh, so that is what you think we are?" exclaimed Dick, as if relieved.

"It is; indeed, I am sure of it."

"Well, you are mistaken, sir."

"You think so?" sneeringly.

"I know it. We are not rebel spies."

"You are not?" There was unbelief in the tones.

"We are not."

"Then who and what are you?"

"A couple of young men who live a few miles from here."

"Farmer boys, I suppose?" sarcastically.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You don't believe me?" remarked Dick.

"I certainly do not."

"But I have spoken the truth, I assure you; we——"

"Say no more," interrupted Captain Sharp. "I was ordered to make you two fellows prisoners and bring you down into the camp. That I shall do, and whatever explanation you have to make of who and what you are may better be made to Governor Tryon."

"So this is a force under the notorious Governor Tryon, eh?" said Dick to himself. "Well, I am glad to know that. But I fear we are in a tight place." Aloud he said:

"Very well, sir; but I assure you that you are making a sad mistake in making prisoners of us."

"That is for the governor to decide; not I. I have my orders and must abide by them."

"I suppose so."

"Yes." Then the captain gave an order to a couple of his men, who stepped forward and removed the "Liberty Boys' " weapons.

It was hard to stand still and permit themselves to be deprived of their weapons in this manner, but there was no help for it. They had sized the situation up carefully, and decided that it would be suicidal to attempt to resist, as they were outnumbered more than five to one, and their enemies had their pistols out, cocked, and leveled. All they would have to do would be to pull trigger, and the result could not be other than disastrous for the two should they attempt to make their escape.

So they made a virtue of necessity and permitted themselves to be disarmed.

"You two carry a good many pistols for simple country farm youths," said Captain Sharp, sarcastically, as he pointed to the eight weapons that had been taken from the "Liberty Boys' " belts.

"We carry the pistols to protect ourselves against the cowboys and skimmers, sir," said Dick.

"Ah, indeed?" There was unbelief in the tone.

"Yes."

"Very well. We will see what the governor thinks about it."

Then to the two who had disarmed the youths: "Bind the prisoners' arms with their own belts, men."

This was quickly done.

Then the captain sent a couple of soldiers into the timber to bring the horses, and the two in question soon returned, leading the "Liberty Boys' " horses.

"A couple of good beasts, captain," said one of the men.

"So they are," agreed the captain, eyeing the horses critically. "Pretty good animals for farm horses."

"Bah, these horses never were hitched to a plow," said the other man, who had gone after the animals.

"I don't know but that you are right," said the captain.

"Well, now we are ready, forward march to the encampment."

The redcoats set out for the camp, with Dick and Bob in their midst, and leading the horses behind them.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND.

They were soon in the British encampment.

The prisoners were conducted to the tent occupied by the commander, Governor Tryon.

He looked the youths over keenly and searchingly.

"You names, please," he said.

"My name is George Hart," said Dick. "My friend's name is Joe Watts."

"Humph!"

The governor looked them over once more.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"About five miles from here, sir."

"Indeed?"

There was doubt and unbelief expressed in the tones.

"Yes, sir."

"You are farmer boys, then?" the governor asked.

"We are, sir."

The governor eyed them still more searchingly, and then said, sternly:

"If you are merely farmer boys, why were you spying on us?"

"We were not doing so, sir," said Dick.

"But I saw you—through this," and he tapped the telescope which lay beside him.

"We were not spying on you, though, sir."

"What were you doing, then?"

"We were simply looking at you out of curiosity."

"Why, then, did you go back into the timber and tie your horses? That looks as though you intended to remain quite a while and play the spy."

"Not at all, sir. I assure you we had no such intention."

"What were your intentions, then, if I may ask?"

"We were going to come down into the encampment,

here, and have a close look at a British army, sir. We have never before seen one."

"Oh, that is it?"

"Yes."

Governor Tryon gazed into Dick's face as if he would read the youth's soul.

The "Liberty Boy" stood the test perfectly.

Governor Tryon did not know it, of course, but he was pitted against a youth who had had so many hair-breadth escapes, so many adventures, and had so often been placed in trying positions similar to this one that he was more than a match for anyone who might be against him. Dick, in fact, was a veteran in every sense of the word, and Bob was almost his equal in all respects.

What Bob lacked in the way of experience as a spy and in being a prisoner in the enemy's hands was made up by his coolness and indifference to danger.

"I hardly know what to do with you two young men," the governor said, finally, in a musing voice. "You may be what you represent yourselves to be, and then again, you may not. I will hold you prisoners for awhile, at any rate; it will do you no harm."

"But our parents will be uneasy about us if we do not get home this evening, sir," said Dick.

"Yes, indeed," said Bob.

"I can't help that," was the reply. "These are troublous times, and almost everyone has to suffer, to a greater or less extent. Your parents can not expect to be exceptions."

"Well, you have the power to do as you like, sir," said Dick. "Of course, we would like to be permitted to go on to our homes, but if it cannot be it cannot, I suppose."

"You are right; you will have to remain here with us to-night. In the morning I will decide what shall be done with you."

This settled it. There was no chance to appeal from this decision. The governor was supreme, and the youths were led away.

They were taken to a point near the center of the encampment and placed under guard.

Soon after they were led from the commander's tent, a messenger came and told the governor that a loyal farmer who lived a quarter of a mile up the road wished him to accept of the hospitality of his home until the force was ready to resume the march.

"That will be more pleasant than to remain here in the tent," said the governor; "so I shall accept the invitation with thanks. It is chilly at night."

He went to the Tory's house, under escort, and was given a warm welcome.

A magnificent supper was served, and was presided over by the hostess, a charming woman. A daughter, a beautiful girl of seventeen, was at the table, also, and assisted materially in making the occasion one of brightness and pleasure.

The governor was charmed by the grace and beauty of Sophia Selby, and took great pleasure in conversing with her.

"I hear you have been fortunate enough to capture some rebel spies, governor," said the girl.

"Yes, Miss Selby," was the reply. "We have two young men in the encampment, and are holding them prisoners."

"And do you really think they are rebels, sir?"

"I hardly know. It is possible, though they deny it most earnestly."

"Of course they would do that," said Mr. Selby.

"Yes, indeed," from his wife.

"True," agreed the governor. "They are handsome, frank-appearing young men, however, and I am half inclined to believe that they are what they claim to be."

"And what is that?"

"They say they live five miles from here, and that they are simple farmer boys."

"Did they tell you their names, governor?" asked Mr. Selby.

"Yes; one said his name was George Hart, and that his comrade's name was Joe Watts."

The host shook his head slowly.

"Never heard of anyone of the name of either of the young men," he said, "and I know most everyone for ten miles around."

"I have never heard the names before," said the hostess.

"And you, Miss Selby?" asked the governor.

The girl hesitated and looked thoughtful.

"I am not sure," she said slowly. "It seems to me that I have heard the names before."

Her father shook his head.

"You must be mistaken, Sophia," he said.

"I don't think I am, father," was the reply. "Though, of course, I may be."

"Well, I shall hold them prisoners awhile, anyway," said the governor. "I am on my way to strike the rebels under Putnam a blow, and then I shall gather a lot of provisions from the rebels and return to my headquarters near Kingsbridge."

"Putnam is at Reading, governor," said Mr. Selby.

"Yes; so I understood."

"He has a small outpost at West Greenwich, however."

"Indeed? Then we will strike that point first, as it is nearest."

When supper was over the family and their guest went to the parlor, and Sophia played and sang for them.

Later on they retired, the governor being given the best room in the house.

Next morning, after breakfast, the governor went back to the encampment, and gave the order for the army to get ready to march.

This was done, and an hour later the march was begun.

When they came to the Selby home the governor called a halt.

He ordered that the two prisoners should be conducted to the house, and this was done.

Then he told the members of the household to take a good look at the youths, and say whether they had ever seen them before.

Mr., Mrs., and Sophia Selby shook their heads when they had completed their scrutiny of the prisoners.

"You have never seen the prisoners before?" asked the governor.

The three said they had not.

"They are strangers to us," said all.

"I expected to hear you say so," the governor said. "I am not at all certain that they are not rebel spies; but I do not wish to be bothered with them as we are marching. I have thought of leaving them behind. Will you take charge of them and hold them here, prisoners, till we come back, Mr. Selby?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "With pleasure. I will take charge of the prisoners, and keep them safely till you return."

"Thanks; that will be a great favor."

The prisoners were conducted to an upstairs room and locked in. Their arms were still bound, so it was not deemed necessary to leave a guard of soldiers.

This having been accomplished, the British and Hessians resumed the march, and soon disappeared in the distance.

Dick and Bob watched them from the windows in their room.

When the enemy had disappeared from sight the two looked at each other blankly.

"This is not pleasant, Bob," said Dick.

"I should say not, old fellow."

"We are out of luck, Bob. There goes the British force headed for Putnam's quarters, and we are prisoners, and unable to go and warn him."

"It is too bad, Dick; but I think 'Old Put.' will be able to give a good account of himself."

"He will if anyone in his place could do so. But what can two hundred men do against fifteen hundred?"

"Not much, I fear."

"You are right."

"And has 'Old Put.' only two hundred men?"

"That is all he has at West Greenwich, where the British will strike first. He has a stronger force at Reading."

"Jove, I wish we had not been captured!"

"What's the use wishing?"

"It was a piece of bad luck."

"So it was. We were stupid for permitting it."

"They played a clever trick on us, in getting away from their encampment with the party while we were back in the timber, tying our horses."

"Yes. Governor Tryon's telescope was what enabled them to do this."

"You are right. A telescope seems to be a good thing."

"Yes. I believe I shall get one at the first opportunity."

"I'd like to get that one away from the governor."

"So would I."

"But we will have to get away from the governor first."

"You are right; and I fear that will be a difficult matter."

"I am afraid so; but let's see if we can get our arms free."

The youths began working at their bonds, but could not make much headway.

An hour passed, and then they heard light footsteps in the hall.

"Someone is coming," said Bob.

"Yes, a girl, judging from the lightness of the footsteps."

"I guess you are right. I wonder if it is that beautiful girl we saw when we were brought to the house?"

"I don't know. I can't see through the wall."

The footsteps ceased in front of the door. Then a key grated in the lock.

The next moment the door opened, and Sophia Selby entered.

Her finger was on her lips to enjoin silence.

CHAPTER III.

DICK AND BOB DISAPPOINTED.

The youths stared in amazement.

They knew that the owner of the house they were in was a Troy, and supposed that his wife and daughter were Tories also.

Yet here was the girl, posing, seemingly, as their friend. At least that was the way they interpreted her looks and actions.

The girl closed the door, and advancing a couple of paces, looked at the youths, inquiringly.

"Are you patriots?" she asked, in a low, cautious voice.

The youths looked at her and hesitated.

"I do not like to answer that question, miss," said Dick. "It is a leading question, you know, and it is not wise to tell much about one's self in these troublous times."

"True, sir; but I am a patriot, sir, and I suspect that you two gentlemen are."

"You are a patriot?" exclaimed Dick and Bob in chorus, surprise in their voices and faces.

"Sh!—yes."

"But your father; he is a——"

"I know father is a loyalist, but I am not."

"Then will you free us, young lady?"

"That is what I came here for, sir."

"Thank you, miss. We shall feel under great obligations to you, and if ever we get a chance to do you a favor, we will do it, rest assured of that."

"You may be able to do me a favor, sir."

"In what way, miss?"

"I have a—a—friend in the patriot army, sir; and I thought that if you are from the patriot army you might know him, and would be kind enough to take a letter to him from me."

"We will be only too glad to do so, miss," said Dick.

"What is your friend's name?"

"Harry Franklin."

"I know him!" exclaimed Bob. "He is in Ethan Allen's regiment."

"Oh, do you know him?" exclaimed the girl, her hands clasping and unclasping.

"Yes, miss," said Bob. "I went fishing with him in the Hudson, not long ago, when there was nothing going on."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say that! And will you take this letter and deliver it to him when you see him again?"

"I will, Miss——"

"My name is Sophia Selby."

"Very well, Miss Selby," went on Bob. "You may rest assured that I shall take great pleasure in handing this letter to Harry the very first time I see him."

"Oh, thank you."

"It may be some time before he gets a chance to do this, however, Miss Selby," said Dick. "You see, General Washington sent us up here to help General Putnam, and we may be here quite a while."

"Of course you must do what you came here to do, sir," said the girl. "All I can ask or expect is that you will deliver the letter to Harry at the first opportunity."

"I will do it, Miss Selby," said Bob.

"Will you tell me your names?" the girl asked. "Your real names, I mean? I know what you told Governor Tryon were your names."

"My name is Dick Slater, Miss Selby," said Dick, "and my comrade's name is Bob Estabrook."

"I have heard of you," the girl exclaimed.

Then she suddenly remembered that work, and not talk, was what was demanded of her, and she quickly unfastened the belts that bound the youths' arms.

"Now, I will show you a way to leave the house without being seen," she said. "Come with me."

"Give me the letter," said Bob. "You have done much for us, and I wish to do something for you in return."

"Here is the letter."

With a blush the girl drew the letter from her dress-bosom, and handed it to Bob, who placed it carefully in an inside pocket of his coat.

Then the girl led the way out into the hall and along it, toward the rear of the house.

At the end of the hall was a stairway, and they went down this. At the bottom they found themselves in the kitchen.

"All you have to do now is to open the door and go straight back past the stable, to the timber," the girl said. "You will easily make your escape, for there is no one here to hinder you, save father."

"Thank you, Miss Selby," said Dick.

"I suppose you know the British have gone to attack General Putnam," said the girl.

"We supposed so. And now, what about it, Miss Selby?"

Would you feel very angry toward us if we were to borrow a couple of horses from your father's stable?"

"No, indeed," was the reply.

"If we are to get to General Putnam in time to warn him we shall have to have horses and ride at top speed," exclaimed Dick.

"So I know, Mr. Slater. Take the horses; and—yes—take a beautiful roan mare that you will find there. She is my own especial property, and is very swift of foot. Take her."

"Thank you, Miss Selby; but we will take two that are more evenly matched in speed. And now, good-by."

"Good-by."

The girl opened the door, and the two youths leaped through the opening and ran toward the stable.

The stableman happened to be at the stable door, and saw them coming.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he cried, barring their way.

"Out of the way," cried Dick. "We want two horses, and have no time to fool away. Stand aside!"

"I will not, you—thieves!"

Crack!

Dick knocked the fellow down with a well-directed blow of his fist. He had no time to waste in parleying with a stubborn stableman.

They dashed into the stable, and quickly bridled and saddled two horses.

As they led the horses forth from the stable they found themselves confronted by the stableman and by Mr. Selby.

The two advanced and stood in the "Liberty Boys" path.

"Stop!" cried Mr. Selby. "How did you escape?"

"That is our affair," said Dick, sternly. "Stand aside."

"I will not! What do you mean by taking my horses from the stable without saying so much as by your leave?"

"It was necessary that we should do so, sir. The British, who left us here this morning, have our horses. You are a loyal king's man, and so we have helped ourselves to horses from your stable. We will return the animals, however."

"You shall not take them away!"

"We must and will do so. Stand aside!"

"We will do nothing of the kind. I——"

Dick made a gesture to Bob, and both leaped into the saddles.

"Out of the way, or get run over!" cried Dick.

The youths forced the horses forward suddenly, and the two men leaped aside hastily.

Mr. Selby managed to get out of the way, but the stableman was not so fortunate. He was struck by the hoofs of the horse Dick bestrode, and knocked down.

He set up a terrible howl, and scrambling to his feet, after the youths were some distance away, limped toward the stable, looking over his shoulder and shaking his fist at the youths.

"You rebel scoundrels!" cried Mr. Selby. "You shall be made to pay dearly for this!"

The youths made no answer, but having reached the road, headed the horses toward the east, and rode rapidly away.

Mr. Selby hastened to the house to try to find out how the prisoners had escaped.

He had left the house a few minutes before, and had made his way to the stable. He found the stableman sitting on the ground, feeling of his jaw and looking dazed and silly, and had asked him what it meant. It was a minute or two before the man could explain, and he had just done so and risen to his feet when the "Liberty Boys" appeared, leading the horses.

What followed has already been told. And now, as has been said, Mr. Selby went to the house to try to learn how the youths had managed to make their escape.

He made inquiries of his wife and daughter, but could learn nothing. Mrs. Selby had no knowledge of the affair, and Sophia kept her knowledge of it to herself.

Mr. Selby went to the room the youths had been confined in, and examined it thoroughly, but found nothing there that gave him any enlightenment.

Meanwhile the two "Liberty Boys" were riding onward at a gallop.

They hoped to be able to reach West Greenwich ahead of the British, and to that end they took a different road from the one the soldiers would march along. It was obvious that they could not pass the British force on the same road.

They were still a mile from their destination when they heard the sound of musket shots.

The crack, crack, crack! soon was drowned out by the roar of volleys, and the youths realized that they would reach the scene too late.

"The British have got there ahead of us, Dick."

"Yes; we are too late."

"And the engagement is under way."

"Yes."

"I hope General Putnam was not taken wholly by surprise."

"So do I. Jove, I wish we had been enabled to get there in time to warn him!"

"Yes. It will be anything but pleasing to me if I find that the British succeeded in surprising Putnam."

"It's the same with me. But let's hurry, Bob. Perhaps we may be able to get there in time to do some good."

"You are right. I would like to get a few shots at the redcoats."

"So would I—to pay them for making prisoners of us, and keeping us from getting here ahead of them."

Onward dashed the "Liberty Boys."

Their horses were comparatively fresh, and the youths did not spare the animals.

Onward they rode as fast as possible. They were eager to take a hand in the battle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ESCAPE AT HORSENECK.

"Good-evening, Dr. Mead."

"Good-evening, General Putnam. I am glad to see you, my friend."

"And I am glad to see you, doctor. How are you and the members of your estimable family?"

"We are as well as common, general. And now, alight. You are going to honor me by making my house your home some while in this vicinity, I know."

"Thank you. I shall be only too glad to do so."

It was the evening of March 25th, 1779.

At almost the same time that Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook were conducted into the British encampment near New Rochelle, General Putnam had ridden up to the house of his friend, Dr. Mead, near West Greenwich, at a point called Horseneck—there being a neck of land extending into the Sound near here, the fancied resemblance to the shape of a horse's neck giving it its name. The above conversation had taken place, and now General Putnam alighted, and Dr. Mead summoned his man-of-all-work and told him to take the horse to the stable and give him every attention.

"And now, general, come into the house," the doctor added.

They entered, and when General Putnam had been greeted by the other members of the doctor's family, the two retired to the library to smoke and discuss the war till supper should be announced.

The two were friends of many years standing, and were indeed like brothers. They talked long and earnestly, and when supper was announced they made their way to the dining-room and did justice to the splendid meal that had been prepared in honor of the distinguished guest.

"Old Put," as he was affectionately and familiarly called by the people of this region, was known to all, and was honored for his bravery and rugged honesty.

When the meal was ended, the two men again repaired to the library, where they smoked and talked for an hour, and then they went to the parlor, and there was singing and music.

Two hours later the women folks retired, and Dr. Mead and "Old Put" went back to the library, and to their pipes and their talk of the war and its hardships.

"Have the British been heard of in the vicinity lately?" asked General Putnam.

"No, not for a long time," was the reply. "Everything has been quiet since you were here last."

"I am glad to hear that, and hope it will last."

"I certainly hope so."

"Yes; but—do you know, I am afraid it won't last."

"You are afraid it won't last?"

"Yes."

"What makes you feel that way about it?"

"I hardly know. Something seems to tell me that trouble is brewing."

With all his common sense, the rugged old veteran had a streak of superstition in his makeup.

"Oh, pshaw, general. That is not like you at all," said Dr. Mead. "We must have something to take that out of you," and he rang a bell.

A servant came, and the doctor ordered that a bottle of wine and some glasses be brought.

They drank the wine, and then the doctor smilingly asked:

"Well, how do you feel now?"

"I feel exhilarated physically, doctor," was the reply, "but I have not lost that feeling of foreboding, or whatever it may be. I feel as though something were going to happen, and soon at that."

"Oh, have some more wine, general, and forget about it," said the doctor.

The general shook his head. "Old Put" was not much of a wine-drinker.

"I have had plenty, thank you, doctor," he said, "and all the wine in Connecticut could not make me lose the feeling I am possessed of. It will not leave me till the something, whatever it may be, takes place."

This was something new in the doctor's experience, and he had some difficulty in reconciling the thought that this rugged, sensible old veteran should be superstitious.

"What could happen?" he asked.

"Well, the most likely thing is that the British should come into this part of the country, and lay waste to the homes of the patriots."

"But you are here, with your brave men, General Putnam," said the doctor. "You would put a stop to that."

"If I were able. You see, the British might come in overwhelming force."

The doctor shook his head.

"I don't think there is much danger of that," he said.

"I don't know," with a shake of the head.

A little later the general was shown to his room, and the doctor retired.

Next morning they were up early, and after breakfast the general went back to his room to shave.

He had lathered one side of his face, and was busily engaged shaving, when he caught sight in the mirror of a body of redecoats marching up the road from the west.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed. "I knew it!"

He dropped the razor, and only half-shaved, he buckled on his sword, rushed downstairs, and to the stable, where he mounted his horse and dashed to where the outpost of patriot soldiers was stationed.

"To arms, men!" he cried. "To arms! The British are coming!"

"Where are they?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Coming up the road; get into position, here on the brow of the hill. We will give the enemy as warm a reception as possible."

There were only one hundred and fifty men, and were

the regular uniformed soldiers from Ridgefield, but all they had, besides their muskets and pistols, were two old iron field-pieces. The two pieces were stationed where they would be most efficacious, and then the patriot soldiers waited.

They were eager, but anxious.

They had no idea how many of the British there were.

They were soon to learn. Soon the British and Hessians came in sight, from where the patriots were stationed, and it was seen that there was a regular little army.

"Great Guns!" almost gasped one patriot soldier. "There are enough of those fellows to eat us up, without salt!"

"We will give them a warm reception, nevertheless," said "Old Put," grimly. "Man the field-pieces, and fire when I give the command."

The men obeyed, and presently General Putnam gave the order to fire.

The men obeyed, and the bang, bang! of the cannon was heard.

It was seen that several of the British went down, dead and wounded, and a wild yell of delight went up from the patriots' throats.

"We downed some of them! We downed some of them!" was the cry.

"Yes, but we will be lucky if we get away with our lives," muttered one soldier to a comrade. "Why, there must be nearly two thousand of those redcoats."

"There are not so many as that, I am thinking," was the reply. "But there are several times too many for us to try to contend with."

The redcoats were angered by the fire from the cannon. They waved their weapons and yelled in a threatening and ominous manner.

Then they started forward on the double-quick.

"Stand firm, men," called out "Old Put." "Don't be afraid. Give them a volley when I say the word."

The men cocked their muskets and got ready to obey the command.

They felt that it was a hopeless case, but they were willing to stand their ground a little while, and exchange a few volleys with the enemy.

To most people the idea that one hundred and fifty men, even though regular soldiers and veterans, should make an attempt to stand their ground and oppose a little army of fifteen hundred is in itself ludicrous, and enough to occasion a smile. But "Old Put." was such a doughty warrior, and withal so brave and fearless that he failed to see the humor of the affair at all. He was in earnest, and was determined not to retire until forced to do so. It would have been the same if he had had only fifty men, instead of one hundred and fifty.

Governor Tryon, when he had observed the number of the "rebels," had smiled with grim sarcasm, and had ordered a company of dragoons to get ready to charge.

The dragoons did so, and as they approached the general ordered his men to fire. They obeyed, and managed to empty two or three saddles.

Then "Old Put" saw that it would be impossible to withstand the terrible charge that was about to be made, and he called out:

"Flee, men, and save yourselves! Take to the swamps!"

The men obeyed instantly, with some few exceptions.

They were only too glad to do so. They knew they had no business trying to stand up in the face of an army, and the majority went in the direction of the swamps with all possible speed.

Their commander then leaped upon his horse, and rode along the edge of the bluff to where a series of rude stone steps led down to the low ground, many yards distant.

"Old Put" was determined not to be captured. At the risk of a broken neck he guided the horse down the steps at a gallop, the redcoats firing at him as he went.

It was indeed an extremely dangerous thing to do, but Putnam knew not the meaning of the word fear. Several of his men fired up at the British as his horse came down the steps; then they fled.

He never stopped to count the possible cost of a thing he always acted, and then looked into the affair afterward, as regarded the being dangerous was concerned.

The British dragoons were made of different material, however.

They would not risk their lives in such a hazardous undertaking, and so reined their animals to a stop at the brow of the hill, and watched the "rebel" with interest.

"Ten to one the rebel breaks his neck!" cried one dragoon, drawing some gold-pieces from his pocket.

"Done!" cried another. "I'll take half a pound's worth at that rate."

The wager made the affair still more interesting, and there was at least one among the dragoons who wished that the American might not reach the bottom of the descent alive.

As "Old Put." progressed without meeting with any mishap, the dragoon began to mutter and grumble.

"A fool for luck, that fellow!" he grumbled. "He ought to be lying on the rocks with a broken neck right now."

"Jove, I believe he'll make it in safety!" cried another.

"He will never do it," the man who had wagered ten to one that the American would break his neck cried, pettishly. "Why, it is an impossibility. He can't reach the bottom in safety."

But he was mistaken. "Old Put." reached the bottom safely, turned in the saddle, shook his fist at the redcoats defiantly, and thundered onward up the road in the direction of Stamford.

CHAPTER V.

DARING WORK.

"The firing has ceased, Dick."

"Yes, I guess the affair is ended."

"Likely; as I understand it, there was only a small outpost at Horseneck, and of course it could do nothing against an army."

"Of course not."

Dick and Bob were riding eastward at a gallop.

They kept on even after the firing ceased, till they came to the top of a wooded knoll, and then Dick said:

"I think we had better stop here, Bob, and take an observation before going on, don't you?"

"I judge it would be best, Dick."

"Yes; we are likely to come upon some of the British, and that would be bad for us."

"So it would."

They brought their horses to a stop at the top of the hill, and dismounted.

Leading the horses back in the woods a little way, they tied them to trees. Then they went back to the road, and turned their eyes in the direction of Horseneck.

To their satisfaction they were enabled to get a good view of the scene.

They saw the redcoats and Hessians, but could see nothing of the patriots.

They had been there only a minute, however, when they saw a horseman riding along the edge of the bluff, across the valley, from where they stood.

Then they saw a body of British dragoons dashing after the lone horseman. The party was nearly half a mile distant, and was going away from them.

"I'll wager the man being chased is 'Old Put,' Dick!" cried Bob.

"Likely you are right, Bob."

"I'm sure of it, for, see, he is taking a desperate chance by dashing down the bluff!"

"So he is; now he has disappeared from sight!"

"I wonder if the dragoons will dare follow him?"

"I don't know."

They watched eagerly, and saw the dragoons come to a stop at the brow of the hill.

"They are not going to follow, Dick!" cried Bob.

"No; they don't care about risking their necks."

The youths saw the dragoons lift their muskets to their shoulders, and then the crack, crack! of the weapons came to their ears.

"Jove, I hope they didn't hit him!" cried Bob.

"So do I."

They watched and presently heard answering shots, and saw the dragoons turn their horses and ride back and rejoin the main army.

"They didn't hit 'Old Put,' Dick," said Bob.

"I think not. Had they done so they would have gone down the hill."

"Yes; he has escaped."

The youths watched the redcoats and Hessians, and saw them begin the work of plundering the patriot houses of the vicinity.

"See what the rascally redcoats are doing," said Bob, his hands clenching. It was evident that he would have

given something to have been in a position to strike the enemy a blow."

"I wish the rest of the boys were here, Dick," he said.

"What good would that do, Bob?"

"We would charge some of the parties of plunderers and scatter them."

"Yes; we might do that. But we might get into trouble by doing so, too."

"Perhaps; I'd be willing to risk it, though."

Dick was watching things closely, and presently he said:

"Look yonder, Bob."

He pointed down into the low ground as he spoke, to where a lot of horses were, under a guard of three soldiers.

"What is it, Dick?"

"The horses."

"I see them. What about them?"

"Don't you see our horses there?"

"Yes, so I do!"

"I would know Major anywhere, and I tell you, I don't intend to let the British have him if I can help it!"

"Ha! you mean that you are going to try to get him away from the enemy?"

"Yes."

"I'm with you."

Bob was always ready when there was any kind of work of a dangerous character to be done. Such work was just in accordance with his nature.

"It will be dangerous work, Bob."

"Who cares for that?"

"I am aware that you don't care for danger, Bob," with a smile. "That's about the only trouble with you: You are always wanting to rush into danger, and it keeps me busy holding you down to common sense actions."

"That's all right; you like to get out and make things lively yourself, Dick."

"Occasionally."

"Yes, oftener than that."

"If there is sufficient incentive, I don't mind doing so, Bob, and I believe there is sufficient this time. I would not lose Major for anything, and I am going to have him back or know the reason why."

"It's the same way with me. I'm going to have my horse back, or know the reason why."

"All right; come along."

The two stole through the timber, and down the side of the knoll.

They were concealed from the view of the three guards, by trees and underbrush, till they were within fifty yards of where the horses were, and this intervening space was open ground.

The guards, the youths noticed, however, were looking in the direction of their comrades a good part of the time. Occasionally they would glance all around, as if keeping a lookout, but the "Liberty Boys" thought it possible that they might succeed in slipping up on them without being seen.

"We'll try it, anyway," said Dick. "Are you ready, Bob?"

"Yes, ready, Dick. When you say the word we will advance."

"I'll tell you what I think we had better do, Bob."

"Well?"

"Wait till we see one of the guards look all around, and then make the advance."

"That's a good plan."

"Yes; and another thing. We must not make an attempt to go slow and slip up to where the guards are."

"What will we do, then?"

"We will make a sudden dash, and run at the top of our speed."

"Ah!"

"Yes; we will run on our tiptoes, so as to make no noise, and it may be possible for us to reach them before they know we are coming."

"All right; I'm with you. Whenever you are ready, say so."

"I will. And remember; knock the guards senseless with a well-directed blow on the head."

"All right; I can do that easy enough."

"Then we will take their weapons."

"Yes; we must have some weapons. They took ours, the rascals!"

The youths watched closely, and presently one of the guards looked around, and then turned his head back, and resumed the work of watching his comrades plunder the patriot houses.

"Now!" said Dick, and with the word he dashed forward, Bob following closely.

They ran on their tiptoes, thus making no noise to speak of.

They were swift runners, and crossed the open space very quickly.

They were within fifteen feet of the three guards, when one of the number turned his head.

He gave utterance to a startled exclamation, and tried to draw a pistol.

He did not succeed, however.

He did not have time.

Dick was upon him like an avalanche, and a well-directed blow on the jaw knocked the redcoat to the earth, senseless.

The other two whirled at this instant, but one received a terrible blow on the temple, knocking him down, where he lay, dazed, blinking up in the air.

The remaining guard managed to jerk a pistol from his belt, but he did not get to use it.

Crack!

Dick's fist struck him on the head and down he went, in a heap, the pistol falling from his nerveless grasp.

The guards were now hors de combat, and the "Liberty Boys" quickly unbuckled two of the belts from around the redcoats' waists, and buckled them around their own

waists. Then they took the pistols and stuck them in their belts.

This done, they hastened to where their horses were standing, and leading them out from among the trees, leaped into the saddles and dashed away.

They rode back toward the knoll, and as they started they heard wild yells, and glanced back, to see a dozen redcoats running toward them. The redcoats were cut across diagonally, in an attempt to head the youths.

"They won't be able to do it, Dick," said Bob.

"No, they can't head us off, but they will be close enough to fire upon us, I am afraid."

"Well, we will have to take our chances."

"Yes."

They rode onward, urging the horses to their best speed.

The redcoats realized that they could not head the youths off, and so they stopped and got ready to fire a volley.

They leveled their muskets, and just as they were pulling the trigger, the two "Liberty Boys" dropped over on their farther side of their horses' necks, and the bullets whistled past, and over their heads.

The next instant they were erect in their saddles again, and urging their horses onward.

Yells of anger and disappointment escaped the lips of the redcoats.

"Stop!" they yelled. "Stop, or you are dead men!"

But of course Dick and Bob did not stop.

The British soldiers might as well have saved their breath.

The "Liberty Boys" were not in the habit of obeying orders of this kind. They were determined to escape and take their horses with them.

On they dashed, and the redcoats drew pistols and fired a volley.

The pistols did not carry the distance, however, and the youths turned in their saddles, waved their hands, and yelled in derision. Then they dashed up the side of the hill, and were soon at the spot where the horses belonged to Mr. Selby were.

A glance backward showed that the redcoats had given up the chase.

"We'll stop and get the horses, Bob," said Dick. "I promised Miss Selby that we would return the animals, and we will do it."

"That's right, Dick."

They leaped to the ground, after bringing their horses to a stop, and entering the timber, untied the horses and led them out to where the others stood.

Then they mounted and rode onward toward the west.

CHAPTER VI.

A BOLD DASH.

"Where are we going, now, Dick? Back to Selby's?"

"Not a bit of it, Bob."

th "Where, then?"

"To Stamford."

"Why, Stamford is five or six miles from here, toward the east—and we are going west!"

"Oh, yes; but you know the saying, Bob, that the longest way around is the shortest way home?"

"I believe I have heard the saying."

"Well, we are going to put that old saying into practical effect."

"Ah, you mean that we are going to go to Stamford, but by a roundabout route."

"That's it. You see, we can't go straight there without running the gauntlet of the British and Hessians, and that would be dangerous."

"So it would."

"In fact, we could not hope to accomplish it successfully."

"No; we would be killed or captured."

"Right."

"But what makes you say we will go to Stamford, Dick?"

"Because I am sure that is where General Putnam will be."

"You think so?"

"Yes; it is only five or six miles from here, is quite a large place, and with a great many patriots living in and around it, and he will no doubt try to get up a force and give battle to the redcoats and Hessians."

"Good! That will suit me. I want to get a chance to fire a few shots at the redcoats who took us prisoners."

"So do I."

The two rode onward till they came to a crossroad.

There was a farmhouse here, and a man came running out to the gate and accosted them.

"What was the firing I heard a little while ago?" he asked. "Was there a battle?"

"Not a battle, exactly, sir," said Dick, eyeing the man critically, and mentally telling himself that he was well pleased with the farmer's looks. "It was a small engagement, and was quickly over."

"Were you in it?" the man asked.

The youths shook their heads.

"No," said Dick. "But we saw it from the top of a hill."

"And—did—did the patriots get—get the worst of it?"

The instant the man said "patriots," Dick was sure he was a patriot himself. A patriot speaking of another one always called him a "patriot," while a Tory or redcoat would speak of a patriot as being a "rebel."

"Yes," replied Dick. "You see, there were not more than one hundred and fifty patriots, and there were fifteen hundred redcoats and Hessians, at the very least. Of course, the patriots could not stand up against such overwhelming odds."

"No, of course not; but, did—do you know whether General Putnam was there?"

"Yes, he was there."

"And was he captured?"

"No; he made his escape."

"Good! I'm glad of—" and then the man stopped suddenly, looked at the youths uneasily, and added: "I—I—that is, I don't know whether you young gentlemen are patriots or—or——"

"We are patriots, the same as you are," said Dick.

"Ah, I'm glad to hear that!"

"I am glad to find a patriot here," said Dick. "I'll tell you why. You see these two led horses?"

"Yes."

"Well, they are the property of a farmer who lives a couple of miles down the road. They were taken by us, but we wish to return them, as the man's daughter did us a favor, and we told her we would return the horses. Her father is a Tory, but she is——"

"What is her name?"

"Sophia Selby; and she is a patriot, because of the fact that she has a sweetheart who is in the patriot army, and——"

"Did she tell you what her sweetheart's name is?" eagerly.

"Yes; it is Harry Franklin."

"And Harry Franklin is my son."

The youths uttered exclamations.

"So you are Mr. Franklin!" from Dick.

"Yes."

"I know your son, sir," said Bob.

"You do?" eagerly. "And have you seen him lately?"

"I went fishing with him in the Hudson not a week ago."

"I am glad to hear you say that! Was he well?"

"Yes, and happy, seemingly, though of course he was a bit homesick."

"Just wait a minute," cried Mr. Franklin. "I must bring my wife out to see you. She will be wild with delight when she learns that you know Harry."

"We will wait to make her acquaintance," said Dick. "But we cannot tarry long, as we wish to reach Stamford as soon as possible and join General Putnam there."

"Ah, then you intend going a roundabout way, in order to get around the British at Horseneck."

"Yes."

"I will show you the way to go as soon as you have met my wife, and told her about Harry."

The man hastened to the house, and returned in a few minutes, accompanied by a buxom, handsome woman, who gave the youths a hearty greeting, and then asked anxiously and eagerly about her son.

The youths told her a good deal about Harry Franklin, Bob doing most of the talking, for he was better acquainted with the young man than Dick was. It was worth while seeing the delight with which the woman heard the news of her son.

Presently Dick said they would have to be going.

"I am going to ask a favor of you, Mr. Franklin," he said.

"It is granted before you ask it, Mr. Slater," he said. Of course, Dick and Bob had told the two who they were.

"I wish to leave the horses here," said Dick.

"Very well. I will take charge of them."

"Thank you; and we will go on our way at once, as we are eager to reach Stamford."

"I will take the horses down to Selby's, if you wish me to do so," the man offered.

"All right; if it won't be too much trouble," said Dick.

"No trouble at all."

"All right, and thank you."

"You must stop as you go back if you pass this way," said Mrs. Franklin.

"We will do so, certainly," said Dick.

Mr. Franklin took the halter-straps and led the two horses away, after bidding the boys good-by, and then they rode onward, waving adieu to Mrs. Franklin.

The farmer had told them the best way to go in order to reach Stamford, without having to go near Horseneck, and they turned to the right at the crossroad, and galloped onward.

A mile in this direction, and then they came to another crossroad.

They turned to the right again, and were now going toward the east. Of course the road did not run straight, but the general direction was eastward.

They urged their horses to a gallop, and the animals, being practically fresh, responded freely, and the youths made splendid time.

"At this rate we will reach Stamford in an hour, Dick," said Bob.

"I think so, Bob, unless we encounter a party of redcoats or Hessians, and are delayed."

"I don't think there is much danger of that, do you?"

"I don't know. They are plundering the patriot homes in the vicinity of Horseneck, you know, and we will pass within less than a mile of there."

"That's so. Well, we will keep a sharp lookout for the enemy, and if we see many of the redcoats we will hide."

"That's right."

Onward they rode, at a gallop, until they came to where they would pass the spot nearest to Horseneck. Before reaching it, they slackened the speed of their horses to a walk.

It was lucky that they did so, for on rounding a turn in the road they came in sight of a house, in front of which were perhaps a dozen redcoats.

There were more redcoats in the house, the youths had no doubt, for this was one of the many small parties from the main army, all of said parties being engaged in robbing and pillaging the houses of the patriots.

The youths reined up their horses, whirled them, and rode back around the bend, out of sight.

"What shall we do, Bob?" asked Dick.

"The boldest way is the best, Dick; let's charge the scoundrels, and give them some bullets."

Dick pondered a few moments.

"All right," he said. "I'm willing. I think that by taking them by surprise we will be able to put them to flight temporarily at least."

"Yes, and maybe for good and all. If we can scare them enough they may not come back."

"True. Well, are you ready?"

"Yes, Dick."

"Come on, then; and don't forget to yell at the top of your voice, 'Come on, boys!' and so forth, to make the redcoats think there is a strong force attacking them."

"I won't forget, Dick."

The youths urged their horses forward at a gallop, and as they rounded the bend in the road and dashed toward the house they drew their pistols and got ready for lively work.

They were careful not to yell until after they were seen by the redcoats. They knew it would be to their advantage to get as close as possible before opening on the enemy with their pistols.

They were within fifty yards of the house before the redcoats knew of their coming. Then some of the British soldiers heard the thunder of the horses' hoofbeats, and whirled to see who was coming.

Seeing that they were discovered, the youths opened fire and at the same time they began yelling loudly:

"Come on, boys! Come on! We've got them now! We've got them now! We'll kill every redcoat on the place! Come on!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS" AND "OLD PUT."

Then the youths opened fire with their pistols.

Crack, crack! Crack, crack!

None of the redcoats were killed, but three were hit, and they set up such terrible yelling as to add to the demoralization of their comrades, who, supposing they were about to be attacked by a strong force, broke and ran for dear life.

"After them!" cried Dick. "Come on, boys, and give chase to the rascals!"

The youths were careful, however, not to go in pursuit.

They paused in front of the house, and watched the British soldiers run, but did not follow.

They were satisfied to have succeeded in driving the redcoats away.

The man of the house came out to the gate, and greeted the youths.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "I thank you for scaring the redcoats away."

"You are welcome," said Dick.

The man looked up the road, in the direction from which the "Liberty Boys" had come. Then he looked inquiringly at the two youths.

"Where are the rest?" he asked.

The boys laughed.

"There are no others," said Dick.

The man stared.

"Do you mean to tell me that you two had the daring charge that party of redcoats, and there are no others with you?" he gasped.

"As you have seen," smiled Dick.

The farmer shook his head.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "That beats anything I ever heard of."

"Oh, that wasn't much to do. We have done such things before."

"Well, it was the most daring piece of business I ever heard of," the man declared. "Jove, I hope the rascals won't come back!"

"They may not return," said Dick.

Bob rode on a few yards, till he could get an uninterrupted view, and looked after the redcoats.

"They are still running," he said. "I doubt their coming back."

"I rather think they won't come back," said Dick. "Well, good-day, sir."

"Are you going?" the man asked.

"Yes; we are in a hurry to reach Stamford, and see if we can find General Putnam."

"He made his escape. I heard the redcoats talking about it."

"Ah, did you?"

"Yes; they said he rode down the rocky bluff over by Horseneck, at a gallop, where his pursuers did not dare follow, and made his escape."

"Good! I am glad to hear that."

"So was I. There would have been many to have grieved had the British captured 'Old Put.'"

"No doubt of it."

Then Dick bade the man good-by once more, and rode onward, Bob falling in alongside.

"Well, we have done a little good, Dick," he said.

"Yes, we spoiled the fun of that party of redcoats."

"So we did; and I think we spoiled the good looks of one or two, judging by the yells they gave utterance to after we fired our pistols."

"We gave them two or three wounds, I am sure."

"Yes."

They rode onward, and presently came to a hill.

Pausing, they looked in the direction of Horseneck.

"I see smoke, Dick."

"Yes, so do I; and I think I see a reflection of fire, as well."

"They must be burning something."

"A house, likely."

"No doubt. Say, Dick, I believe I'll climb that tree, there, and see what is burning."

"Go ahead; perhaps you may be able to locate some parties of redcoats as well, and by so doing we may be enabled to avoid them."

Bob leaped to the ground, and quickly climbed up into the top of a large tree growing near at hand.

"Do you see what it is that is burning, Bob?" called out Dick.

"Yes; there is a sloop burning, just off the shore, in the Sound, and there are two buildings on fire."

"Dwellings?"

"I don't think they are; they don't look like dwellings."

"What are they, then?"

"I don't know."

"Ah, I have it," exclaimed Dick. "They are probably the salt works."

"Oh, yes; I've heard about them. That is what they are, I'll wager."

"See any parties of redcoats in this vicinity?"

"No."

"Come down, then, and we will be going."

Bob descended, and mounted his horse.

"Now for Stamford," said Dick.

They urged their horses onward.

It did not take them long to reach Stamford.

Here they found the people greatly excited.

The town was in a turmoil.

"Have you seen or heard anything of General Putnam?" asked Dick, addressing a man whom they encountered at the edge of the town.

"Are you patriots?" was the counter question.

"Certainly we are."

"All right, then. Yes, General Putnam is in the town. You will find him at the public square."

"Thank you. What is he doing?"

"Getting up a force of patriots to go and make an attack on the British."

"Come on, Bob."

The two galloped onward into the town, and to the public square.

There they saw General Putnam standing on a box, talking to a large crowd, and just as they rode up and stopped, the general made an appeal for volunteers to join him and go and attack the redcoats.

The citizens responded promptly.

Three or four hundred quickly volunteered, and they were cheered to the echo by the members of the great crowd.

"Never mind cheering those who have volunteered," called out "Old Put." "Come forward and volunteer. That will please me better."

This created a laugh, and at least two hundred more came forward.

"That's right; that's the way to do!" cried Putnam approvingly. "Come forward and volunteer. You have responded nobly, so far; but I want all the men I can get, so come up and volunteer, men; come along. Remember,

you are fighting for your homes and families. We must strike the British at Horseneck, if possible, and that will prevent them from advancing farther in this direction. If not stopped or opposed in any way they will advance and burn your town. You are simply protecting yourselves in volunteering."

This brought at least one hundred more recruits, and the general had now a pretty respectable force gathered about him.

He kept on talking to the crowd, and calling for volunteers, however, for an hour or more, and when he finally stopped he had a force of nearly eight hundred men.

By this time a number of his men, that had fled for their lives when the British attacked them at Horseneck, arrived on the scene, and they were added to the force.

Dick and Bob had watched the scene with considerable interest.

They did not wish to bother the general while he was busy, so sat on their horses and watched and waited patiently.

When at last "Old Put." ceased calling for volunteers, and got down off the box, the youths leaped to the ground, and made their way to where the general stood.

They were very well acquainted with him, having seen him in New York a number of times, and he recognized them the instant his eyes rested on their faces.

"Well, well; it's Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook!" he exclaimed, shaking hands with them heartily. "What brings you here?"

"We have come from General Washington, sir," said Dick. "We are the bearers of a message to you."

"Ah, indeed. Let me have the message, Dick."

"It is a verbal one, sir."

"Ah, yes. Well, come into the inn here, and we will go to a room, where we will not be disturbed, and then you can give me the message."

"Very well, sir."

They entered the inn and went to a room, where they could be to themselves, and in no danger of being disturbed.

Then Dick told the general what Washington had told him to say, and the general listened intently.

"All right, Dick," said the general, when the youth had finished. "I'll attend to the matter the commander-in-chief wishes me to look after just as soon as I have got through with this affair with the British. That had first call on me, now."

"And may Bob and I help you in this affair, general?"

"I shall be only too glad to have you do so, my boys. I shall need all the help I can get."

"So you will," said Dick.

"By the way, you boys must have come past Horseneck in getting here," Putnam said. "Did you see the redcoats?"

"Yes, we saw them."

"What were they doing?"

"They were robbing the patriots, and were burning s buildings and a sloop."

"Just like the cowardly scoundrels!" Putnam cr

"Were the buildings that were on fire dwellings?"

"They didn't look like dwellings," said Bob.

"Ah, I know what they were," said the general. "They were salt work buildings."

"That is what I guessed them to be," said Dick.

"Yes; that is what they were; but unless we get Horseneck pretty quickly, and frighten the redcoats away, I fear they will burn a lot of patriot houses."

"Likely you are right."

"I am sure of it, and I am going to get my men started toward Horseneck just as soon as they have armed themselves."

He had told the volunteers to go home and get their weapons and come back as quickly as possible, before they went into the inn with Dick and Bob, and by the time the three were out of doors again many of the men were on hand, with weapons in their hands.

Another hour and all were there, ready for the march, and Putnam did not delay a moment, but gave the order.

"Forward, march, men!"

And the force of eight hundred patriots marched out of Stamford and away toward the west.

They were bound for Horseneck.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE MARCH.

It was almost noon when the little army marched away. It was five miles to Horseneck, and this was a good hour and a half's walk, so it was just about one o'clock when they reached Horseneck.

They found that the enemy had gone away.

General Putnam was glad to see the house of his friend Dr. Mead, still standing, and the doctor met him at the gate as he rode up in company with Dick and Bob.

The two gave each other warm greetings.

"I congratulate you on your escape from the British, General Putnam," said the doctor.

"Thank you; and I congratulate you on escaping without having your roof burned over your head, doctor."

"I have been congratulating myself on that, general," was the reply. "I expected nothing else than that my house would be burned."

"What is the extent of the damage done here, doctor?"

"Well, they have done considerable damage. They have pillaged every patriot home, taking most everything of value, and have burned the store, two or three salt-work buildings, and a sloop."

"And which way did they go?"

"Back toward the west."

"How long since they went?"

"About an hour."

"Ah, then we may be able to overtake them."

"But what if you do, general? They outnumber you most two to one, I should judge."

"No matter. We will give them a good fight if we get thin striking distance of them."

That was General Putnam all over. He did not stop to count the odds against him.

He introduced Dick and Bob to the doctor, and then, after a few more words, gave the order for the army to march.

They moved onward, toward the west, but after they had gone a mile or so the general called a halt.

"I don't want to run into a trap," he said to Dick and Bob, "and so I have decided that it will be best to send scouts ahead, to see if the coast is clear, before advancing with my army."

"I think that will be a wise thing to do," agreed Dick.

"And Dick and I will do the scouting for you," said Bob. "Thank you," said the general. "I shall be glad to have you do this. I will send an advance guard, also, on duty."

This was done. Dick and Bob rode onward, and half a dozen of the volunteers went forward, through the timber, to see if they could see anything of the British.

The "Liberty Boys" rode slowly, for they did not know at any moment they might come upon the rear guard of the enemy at any moment.

They rode onward a mile, and seeing nothing of the enemy, turned and galloped back.

"You may march forward a mile," said Dick. "The coast is clear at least that distance. Bob and I will go ahead again."

"Very well," said the general, and he gave the command for the men to march.

The two "Liberty Boys" rode in a gallop to where they had turned back, and then slowed down to a walk again.

They went another mile, and then turned back, and reported to General Putnam that the coast was clear still another mile.

This was kept up till they reached the vicinity of Rye Point, and then the youths caught sight of the British from the top of a hill.

The enemy had stopped at the Point, and the soldiers were going into camp.

The youths were a mile away from the British, but could see what was going on quite plainly.

"They are going into camp, Dick!" said Bob.

"Yes, Bob."

"I wonder why they are doing that? It isn't late."

"Doubtless they are very tired; they are loaded down with plunder, you know."

"That's so. Well, it will give us a chance to go for them."

"So it will. But it will be impossible to take them by surprise, I think."

"True; they will, of course, have outposts stationed."

"Yes; but I am glad they have stopped. It will give General Putnam more time to figure out some way of getting at them."

"So it will. Jove, I believe that if I was commander of the force of patriots I should have them slip up as close as possible, and then charge upon the British."

"That would not be a good plan, Bob. They outnumber us two to one, nearly, and they would beat us at that game."

"I don't know about that," with a shake of the head. "I tell you it would be a hard matter for them to withstand a charge from eight hundred men."

"But you must remember, Bob, that the eight hundred men are militiamen, and a charge from such a body of men is quite different from one made by a body of veterans. A few volleys from the British would likely throw our force into disorder, and then the probabilities are that the enemy would charge us. You know what would happen?"

"That's so," agreed Bob. "It would be all up with us then, for the militiamen would be utterly demoralized."

"Yes."

The youths then turned their horses and rode back till they met the patriot force.

They explained the situation to General Putnam.

"So the British have stopped, and are going into camp at Rye Point, eh?" the old veteran exclaimed. "Well, we must manage to figure out some plan for striking them a blow that they won't forget in a hurry."

"We might as well advance to the top of the hill from which we saw the British," said Dick. "We can stop there and hold a council then."

This was acted upon, and half an hour later the patriot force was on the top of the hill.

General Putnam took a look at the British.

"They evidently intend to remain there till morning," he said, when he had finished his survey.

"Yes, there can be no doubt regarding that," said Bob.

"Well, we ought to be able to inflict some damage upon them before morning, I am thinking."

"Yes, we can make the attempt, at any rate," said Dick.

After some further conversation Dick volunteered to venture closer to the British encampment for the purpose of trying to discover the best point from which to advance when the attack should be made.

"It will be a big help to us to know that," he said.

"Yes, so it will," agreed the general. "Well, go along, Dick; but be careful. Don't let the redcoats capture you."

"They will have to be wide awake if they do so, General Putnam."

"I know that, but there is always chance for something to catch a fellow when he is not prepared for it—as the attack on us at Horseneck this morning. I had no idea there were any redcoats nearer than New York, and of a sudden saw a big force riding up the road."

"True," agreed Dick. "I'll be careful."

"Better let me go along, Dick," said Bob.

"No, I think it will be safer if I go alone. There will not be so much danger of discovery if there is only one."

"All right; but if you aren't back before dark I shall start out to look for you."

"I'll be back before dark."

"You had better be."

Then Dick took his departure.

He moved along down the road for a quarter of a mile, and then, fearing he might be seen if he kept to the road, he entered the timber and stole through it.

He had gone perhaps another quarter of a mile when he was suddenly confronted by a tall, lank, roughly-dressed man, who held a huge pistol extended, and covering Dick.

"Jes' stop whar ye are," was the command, delivered in a calm voice. "Don' come enny further, young feller, on-till I say ye may."

Dick stopped, and eyed the man keenly. The fellow did not have a bad face, but of course the youth could not say whether the man was a patriot or a Tory.

"What do you want?" Dick asked.

"I wanter tork ter ye."

"For what purpose?"

"Waal, fur wun thing, I wanter know who ye are."

"My name is George Hart; what's yours?"

The man leered.

"Ye wanter know who I am, d'ye?" he asked.

"Well, not particularly; but as I have told you who I am it is no more than fair that you should tell me who you are."

"All right. I'm Jim Clark. Ever heer uv me?"

There was a look on the fellow's face that told Dick he expected to hear him say he had heard of Jim Clark, and when the youth shook his head and said he never had heard the name before, the fellow looked surprised.

"Ye never heerd uv me afore?" he exclaimed.

"No."

"Waal, thet's funny; most ever'buddy in these parts knows er hez heerd tell uv Jim Clark, I'm tellin' ye."

"Is that so?"

"Yas; most ever'buddy hez heerd uv Tory Jim."

It was out now. The fellow was a Tory, and undoubtedly a notorious one in these parts. Dick felt that he was in for trouble; but he was ready to meet it.

"Oh, you are called 'Tory Jim,' are you?" he remarked.

"Yas, 'cause I'm er loyal king's man; ye bet I've made er lot uv ther rebels aroun' heer wush't they'd never seen Tory Jim!"

"Oh, you have?"

"Yas, an' thet's whut I'm goin' ter do with ye, young feller."

"Why so? I haven't done anything to you."

"Mebby ye hain't done nothin' ter me, spechully; but ye're er rebel, an' thet makes ye my enemy, an' et's ther same ez ef ye hed done sumthin' ter me."

"How do you know I'm a rebel?"

The fellow leered.

"Oh, Tory Jim knows er thing er two," he said. "I 'O all erbout ther rebel army bein' up on ther hill, an' 'Y 'Ole Put.' is thar with et, an' I know ez how ye hev ?" down this way ter play ther spy onter ther British."

"Well, what are you going to do to me?"

"I'm goin' ter march ye down inter-ther British c" an' turn ye over ter Governor Tryon, that's whut I'm " ter do!"

The "Liberty Boy" saw that he could not escape v fi out a fight, and he made up his mind to take the inv tive. He would try to take the fellow by surprise and s arm him, and then trust to being able to overcome hind a hand-to-hand combat.

Having so decided, he lost no time in getting to wor tt He suddenly leaped ten feet to one side.

This took the Tory by surprise, and he whirled, T the intention of again covering Dick with the pistol; I he was too slow. The youth was upon him, and seizing T weapon, wrenched it out of its owner's hands. at

Then they grappled, and began struggling fiercely. l

CHAPTER IX.

DICK AND "TORY JIM."

Dick Slater was as strong and athletic as any man he o ever had hold of in his life. Indeed, he could not cal mind more than two or three instances in which he v met his match in a hand-to-hand struggle.

He was young, active, and supple, and was so used exposure and hard knocks that he was as tough as a p knot. It was practically impossible to tire him out. would have to be overpowered by superior physical fo that was all there was to it.

And there was little doubt that Tory Jim imagined would be able to overcome the youth. The exclamation satisfaction that escaped his lips when he felt Dick with his grasp proved this. Doubtless he compared his size w that of Dick, and decided that the disparity in his fae should give him the victory; but here was where he m a mistake. Size does not always count.

It did not take Dick long to prove to Tory Jim that i was not to have everything his own way.

To the Tory's amazement he found that his youthful oponent was one who was very hard to handle.

"Ye're a purty husky youngster, an' thet's er fack," t tall man muttered. "But I'll show ye thet ye hain't match fur Jim Clark."

"Will you?" remarked Dick, and he gave the big fellow twist that nearly downed him.

"Blame yer picter; ye wanter be keerful!" the lanky m growled angrily. "I'm er man with er purty bad temp an' I'm mighty apt ter do ye sum damage ef ye go f to causin' me too much trubble."

"If you are able," was the cool retort.

"Oh, I guess thar hain't no danger but I'll be able."
 an' "You don't think there is any chance for a mistake, never?"
 h." "Not er bit uv et. Thar never wuz er boy uv yer age whut could git ther better uv Jim Clark."
 h e "I shall have to prove to you that there is at least one."
 'm g "Ye kain't do et."

Dick had been afraid that the Tory would yell for help, but now he dismissed the fear from his mind. He knew that the fellow was so confident he could overcome and his youthful opponent that he would not yell for help, and this was just what the youth wanted.

"If I can succeed in getting hold of his throat, I'll soon rattle him, and he will be unable to yell, even if he wants to," Dick told himself.

The struggle went on.

It was a fierce one.

Tory Jim was determined to make a prisoner of the patriot youth, and take him to the British camp.

He thought this would be a fine thing to do, and that it would earn for him words of praise from Governor Tryon.

And so it would have done had he been able to do the work.

Doing it was the difficulty, and he was fast learning that it was going to be very difficult.

"Blame yer picter!" he growled, "yer ther hardest youngster ter han'le thet ever I got erholt uv."

"You'll think so before you get through with the affair," was the cool reply.

"But I'll beat ye, all right."

"That remains to be seen."

"Waa ye'll see thet I've told ther truth."

"If ye overcome me you will be the first Tory or redcoat who ever accomplished the thing," said Dick.

"Waal, I'll do et, ye bet!"

"Perhaps you will; perhaps you won't."

"Ye'll see," and then the fellow went to work with renewed energy.

It was about as hard a contest as Dick had ever been engaged in. The Tory was indeed a tough, wiry, and strong man, and he was, like Dick, inured to hardship, and was hard to tire out. It was about diamond cut diamond in this respect.

Dick realized that it would be only by some clever trick that he would secure the mastery, and he began working toward that end.

He was ready to take advantage of any opening, and watched for an opportunity closely.

He was afraid that some of the redcoats might come along, and then, of course, he would be made a prisoner, for he could not hold out against others in addition to his present opponent.

He began forcing matters, and this made the Tory mad.

"Oh, ye think ye'll do sumthin' big, now, don' ye!" he growlingly remarked.

"Well, I think it will be a pretty big thing to get the better of you, that's a fact," acknowledged Dick. "I will admit that you are about the hardest man to handle that I have ever had hold of."

"Ye'll think so afore ye git through with me."

"And you will think the same thing about me."

"Oh, I think thet, alreddy; ye're er mighty husky youngster, an' thet's no mistake."

Then the struggle went on.

It became fiercer and fiercer, for Tory Jim became enraged when he found he could not overpower the youth whom at first he had supposed would be an easy conquest for him, and he worked at a furious rate to bring the affair to an end.

Dick kept right up with him, however, and was able to hold up his end, and meet his opponent at least halfway; and after awhile he began to feel that he was getting the better of his opponent. The terrible exertions the man had been making were beginning to tell upon him at last. He was weakening, slowly but surely.

The "Liberty Boy" was sure of this, and he at once began putting forth all his energies to the task of overpowering the man.

Tory Jim seemed to realize the fact, finally, and he grew pale, where before he had been red with rage.

"Ye think ye've got me, don' ye!" he hissed.

"I'm pretty sure of it," was Dick's reply.

"Waal, ye'll fin' thet ye're mistook, young feller; ye'll never git ther best uv Jim Clark."

"That remains to be seen."

Then Dick let out another link, and went at the man harder than ever. He felt that he would soon have the lank Tory at his mercy.

His only fear now was that the fellow would yell and alarm the redcoats and bring some of them to his assistance.

"I must get him by the throat and head anything of that kind off," thought Dick.

He began maneuvering, and finally succeeded in getting hold of Tory Jim's throat.

The instant he felt the grip of Dick's fingers the man tried to cry out for help; but the cry died away on his lips. It ended in a gasp, and he began getting red in the face, as he strove to get his breath and found he could not.

Then he began making desperate efforts to get his neck free from Dick's grasp, and here again he failed.

The "Liberty Boy" had got an iron grip, and was determined to retain it; the harder the Tory tried to get his neck free, the worse he was choked.

He could not get his breath, and there could be only one result; he was soon so weak he could not do anything more, and his knees gave way, and he tumbled to the ground in a heap.

The "Liberty Boy" did not at once let go of the fellow's throat, however. He thought the Tory might be shamming, in order to get him to let go, when he would yell and bring some of the British to his assistance.

So he kept the grasp on the man's throat, and choked him till certain the fellow was unconscious. Then he let go, and lifting the man's form, carried it through the timber, going back in the direction of the spot where the patriot force was stationed.

It was quite a job to carry the Tory half a mile, and part of the way up hill at that, but Dick managed to do it, and when he entered the camp he caused no end of excitement.

"What in the name of all that is wonderful have you there?" asked General Putnam.

He advanced and looked at the insensible man as Dick laid the form on the ground.

"Why, it's Jim Clark, the Tory!" he exclaimed.

"You know him, then?" asked Dick.

"I should say I do know him, and a more conscienceless scoundrel never went unhung. You have done a good thing in capturing him, Dick."

"I am glad of that."

"I have long wished to get my hands on the scoundrel," continued "Old Put." "He has spied on me and done me a lot of harm, during the past two or three months, but he was too smart for us, and we could never get our hands on him."

"That was up at Reading?"

"Yes. He lives not far from here, however, so I have been told."

"He boasted to me that most people in this vicinity knew him, or of him, at least," said Dick.

"That is true, I judge; and I would wager that they know very little that is good about him."

"I judge that is correct, from what I have seen of him."

"Did he attack you?"

"Yes; he appeared before me, suddenly, with a leveled pistol, and said he was going to take me down into the British encampment and turn me over to Governor Tryon."

"How did you manage to get the better of him, if he had the advantage of you in that fashion?"

"I was too quick for him; I jumped aside before he could pull trigger, and then seized the pistol and wrenched it from his hands. He seized me, then, and we had a lively tussle, but I finally got the better of him."

"What did you do—thump him over the head?"

"No; I choked him into insensibility. He will be all right in a few minutes."

"I will have his hands bound, so he can't do anything desperate," said the general.

He did so, and then Dick again took his departure, to go and spy on the British.

and he hastened onward in the direction of the British encampment.

When he was within a third of a mile of it, he slackened his speed to a slow walk, and advanced very cautiously.

He kept a sharp lookout all around him, for he did not know but there might be more Tories in the vicinity, comrades of Jim Clark, and he did not wish to become mixed up in another combat. Not that he had any fear of the outcome of such an encounter, but he had other work to do.

Soon he reached a point from where he could get a fair good view of the British encampment, and pausing behind a tree, looked searchingly in that direction.

The "Liberty Boy" had had a great deal of experience in such work, and it did not take him long to decide upon the point at which it would be best to make an attack.

While he was standing there he saw a couple of officers leave the encampment, and come strolling over toward where he was.

The youth thought it might be possible to overhear a portion of their conversation, and thus learn something, and so he stood his ground, and watched the two closely.

They came to the edge of the timber, and there paused. They were smoking, and they at once entered into a conversation which was very interesting to Dick.

The first words Dick heard were:

"And you say that is the house, down yonder, half a mile to the west?"

"So Tory Jim, as he is called, told me."

"And he says the man has money?"

"Lots of it, and gold money, too."

"What is he, a miser?"

"Yes, and a rebel one at that."

"Then it will be no sin to take the gold away from him."

"Of course not."

"And if he objects we will——"

"Knock him on the head."

"That is just what we will do."

"The fewer rebels there are, the better it will be for our king."

"Yes; but I am more interested in getting my hands on that gold than in soaking them in the miser's blood."

"It's the same with me. You see, I have had a terrible bad run of luck with the cards, and am owing the other officers a lot of money."

"It's the same with me, and if we can get enough money from the old rebel miser to pay our debts and give us a stake to start with again, we will be all right."

"So we will."

"When shall we do the work?"

"Oh, we will wait till after midnight, and then do the work."

"How will we get out of the camp without being seen by the sentinel?"

"We won't be able to do so, but we will bribe him not to say anything."

"I see."

CHAPTER X.

DICK OVERHEARS A PLOT.

It was now nearly evening. Dick was sure he could get the lay of the land before it got too dark to see, however,

"Jove, I hope that Tory Jim told the truth about the rebel miser!"

"So do I."

"It will be a big disappointment if we get there and have come away empty-handed."

"Yes; but we won't come away empty-handed if we can help it."

"No; before doing that we will wrest the miser's secret of the hiding place of his gold from him, if we have to very nearly hang him."

"That we will; but I fear we may have a hard time making him give up the secret. They say misers would about believe lose their lives as their money."

"I guess that is true. Well, if he won't tell we'll hang him for good and all, and then find the gold."

"That's right. We can surely find it, for it would in all likelihood be hidden somewhere about the house."

"Yes; they always want their gold where they can look it often."

"True."

"By the way, I wonder where Tory Jim is?"

"I don't know. He was with us till the middle of the afternoon."

"He'll be back soon, I judge."

"Yes, likely."

"I think you are mistaken about that," thought Dick. "Tory Jim won't be back to this camp at all, I'm thinking."

The two officers remained there nearly half an hour, and Dick learned from their conversation that they were a couple of dissipated officers, who much preferred gambling and carousing to fighting for the king or anyone else. There were many such among the British officers in America during the War of the Revolution.

Presently the two returned to the encampment, and Dick, having acquired all the information that he thought it possible to acquire, went back to the patriot encampment.

Tory Jim was sitting near the center of the camp, and when he saw Dick his eyes flashed.

"I'll settle with ye, sum time, fur this, young feller!" he hissed, as Dick passed him.

"Barking dogs seldom bite," said Dick, carelessly.

"You'll find that I can bite, and you kin bet thet I will do et, too."

"You will have to get the chance first, Tory Jim," Dick said, pausing and glancing back at the prisoner.

"I'll get et, never ye fear."

"How?"

"Never ye min'."

"I don't see how you will find a chance to get even with me. You are a prisoner, and General Putnam is going to hold you for some time. You will have to give up your idea of getting even."

"Ye'll see."

Dick smiled and walked on. He was soon at the tent occupied by General Putnam, and entering, after being an-

nounced by an orderly, told "Old Put." what he had seen, and explained where he thought it would be best to approach the British encampment.

He did not say anything about the conversation he had overheard between the two British officers, as it was his intention that he and Bob should attend to that matter.

"At what hour will the attack be made, general?" he asked.

"I think we might as well attack the enemy before midnight—at eleven o'clock, say."

"That will be as good a time as any," agreed Dick.

General Putnam sent out word for the men to be ready to advance upon the British encampment at eleven o'clock.

As soon as they learned that there was to be an attack made on the British, the patriot soldiers gave up all idea of going to sleep. They decided to sit up and wait for the time to advance.

As it would be several hours before the army would march against the British, Dick decided to reconnoiter the home of the miser that was to be robbed by the British officers, and get the lay of the land, so he would know where to station himself when watching for the coming of the officers.

While eating his supper, he told Bob what he had heard the British officers talking about.

"So they are going to rob the old miser, eh?" exclaimed Bob, eagerly.

"That is what they intend to do."

"Well, we will put a stop to that, eh, Dick?"

"Yes; I have made up my mind to do so, Bob."

"And I'm with you; we will teach them that the way of the transgressor is hard."

"We will, or know the reason why."

When Dick was through eating he and Bob left the encampment, and made their way westward along the road. As it was dark they were not much afraid of being discovered, so kept in the road, and passed within two hundred yards of the edge of the British encampment.

They continued onward, and half a mile farther on they saw a light gleaming faintly from among the trees at the righthand side of the road.

"The light must be in the miser's house, Dick," said Bob.

"Likely, Bob. Come along, and we will see."

They turned aside and went toward the light.

Presently they came to a small, log house. There was one door, and one window in the cabin.

A light shone through the window.

They walked up and looked through the window.

They saw the candle, which was thrust in the neck of a black bottle standing on a rough table at the farther side of the room. But nowhere did they see any signs of an occupant.

Finally Dick managed to get a look over in a semi-dark corner, and there saw an old man. He was bending over, working at something, and they finally made out that

he was lifting a slab—the floor of the cabin being made of rough-hewn slabs.

He lifted the slab, and drew something forth.

They saw it was a bag, and they heard the chink of coins.

The old man hefted the bag, patted it, hesitated, and then replaced it in the opening under the slab, and returned the slab to its place.

"That is his hoard," said Bob in a whisper. "There must be considerable gold in that bag."

"Yes; it is a strange thing, to my way of thinking, that he has not long since been robbed or murdered, or both."

"That's what I think."

"I would have thought that Tory Jim was just the man to do such a thing."

"So would I."

The youths watched a while longer, and then took their departure. They had not gone far when they heard footsteps and voices.

"Somebody is coming!" said Bob, in a cautious voice.

"Yes; let's hide behind these bushes, here, and see who they are."

The youths did so. The night was quite dark, but was clear, and it would be possible to make out the forms of any persons who passed near the spot.

As they crouched in their place of concealment, the youths listened intently, and they heard enough to inform them that the newcomers were two in number, and suddenly Dick whispered:

"It is the two British officers!"

"Are you sure?" whispered Bob.

"Yes."

"Then probably they have decided to rob the old miser at once, instead of waiting till after midnight!"

"Likely enough. Well, we will follow them, and keep our eyes on them, and if they make the attempt we will foil them."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WOULD-BE ROBBERS APPEAR.

The two officers passed within a few yards of where Dick and Bob were concealed.

As soon as the two were a little ways past, the "Liberty Boys" stole forth from their place of concealment, and followed.

The youths kept within fifteen yards of the British officers, and when the latter came to a stop, at the window of the miser's little cabin, the youths paused also.

They waited, watched, and listened.

They expected that at any moment the officers would make an attempt to enter the cabin; but they did not do so.

"I wonder why they are delaying?" whispered Bob.

"Perhaps they, like us, came up here on a tour of investigation, Bob."

"Jove, that's so; possibly they do not intend to do work now."

"I should not be surprised if they simply came up to the lay of the land, with the intention of coming back after midnight, as they said they would do when I first heard them lay their plans."

"Likely you are right; but I wish they would make an attempt now, while we are here; then we could go and give them a thrashing and have done with it."

Bob was always eager. He never liked to have an affair of this kind postponed. If there was to be a fight, he wished to get at it at the earliest possible moment.

Pretty soon the two redcoats came away from the cabin, and as they moved away Dick and Bob followed them.

"I guess we have learned all that is necessary," the youths heard one of the two say.

"Yes," was the reply. "I think we shall have an easy job getting that old duffer's gold."

"Of course it will be easy enough for us to overcome the one old man, but it may not be so easy to make him tell where the gold is concealed."

"That's so. Well, we'll do it, or kill the old scoundrel."

"A couple of heartless brutes, Bob," whispered Dick.

"So they are, Dick, and I shall be glad to foil them."

Presently the two officers turned aside, to go to their encampment, and Dick and Bob went on up the road toward their camp.

"Been out reconnoitering?" asked a soldier, as they entered the camp.

"Yes," replied Dick.

"See anything of interest?"

"Nothing of much interest to our men."

"All is quiet, eh?"

"Yes."

The youths went to the place where their blankets had been left, and unrolling the blankets, threw themselves down to get a little rest before the time for starting to attack the British camp.

About half-past ten o'clock the entire patriot force was in motion.

The little army moved down the road, and drew near the British encampment.

They hoped to take the enemy by surprise.

This, of course, would be a hard thing to do, however. So it proved, at any rate.

Governor Tryon had suspected that the patriots might follow him, and he placed out a double line of sentinels. The result was that the advance of the patriot force was discovered while yet it was too far away to do any damage, and the alarm was sounded.

The instant this occurred, General Putnam ordered a charge, and the patriots rushed forward, driving the sentinels into the encampment.

soon as they were within musket-shot distance, Put ordered that a volley be fired. The men obeyed. It did some damage, for wild yells of pain and rage came up immediately afterward. It aroused the British to immediate action as well, and the next moment there came an answering volley. A number of the patriots went down, dead and wounded. The groans and shrieks of the wounded, and the yells of the angry combatants made the night hideous. It was a regular pandemonium. Putnam ordered the men to charge the British, but they were militia, and refused to do so. Then he ordered them to stand their ground and keep on firing; this they did for a little while, and then the voices of the British officers were heard, urging their men to charge. This gave the patriot militiamen a scare, and they fled and fled. In vain did "Old Put." call to them to stop and stand their ground; they would not do it. They were frightened, and nothing could stay their flight. Seeing that the men would not stop, the regular soldiers and the officers followed. The retreat was a rapid one, and so far as the militia were concerned it was a rout, practically. They did not stop till they got back to the encampment on the hill, and even after they got there they were still frightened. "Old Put." was greatly put out, and he berated them soundly. "Why didn't you stand your ground and fight like men?" he cried. "You are a nice lot, you are! Ran like a flock of sheep! I'm ashamed of you!" "We're ashamed of ourselves," called out one of the officers, who was far enough back in the crowd so that he could not be told who he was. "I should think you would be!" scathingly. "Well, next time redeem yourselves. Stand your ground and fight. Don't be afraid of the redcoats; meet them squarely and bravely, and give them shot for shot, and blow for blow." "We will try to do so," cried a soldier. "That's right; do so—and do more than try; do it." "Old Put." was not very well satisfied with the result of the attack on the British. His men had suffered quite as much as had the British, he was sure; but it could not be helped, and so, having placed out sentinels, he retired to his tent. "He does not intend making another attack to-night, I guess," said Bob. "No," said Dick. "It would do no good. The British are on their guard, and we could not get close enough to them any damage without getting damaged ourselves." "I guess that is true." It was now past eleven, and the two "Liberty Boys" left the encampment, and moved down the road to the westward. They had decided to go at once to the home of the old

miser, so as to be sure of being there when the British officers put in an appearance.

They moved slowly and carefully, for they did not know but they might encounter some redcoats.

In this they were agreeably disappointed, however, and they were not long in reaching the home of the miser.

All was quiet in the vicinity of the cabin.

There was no light shining out of the window.

"He has gone to bed," said Bob.

"Well, it is certainly time he should be in bed, Bob."

"You are right. It must be nearly midnight."

"Yes."

"I hope the redcoats will come soon."

"I don't think we will have to wait very long."

"The shorter the wait, the better I will like it."

"It's the same with me. I want to get back to camp and get some sleep."

The youths took up their positions, not far from the front door of the cabin, and waited as patiently as was possible, under the circumstances.

They waited for, it seemed to them, an hour, and still the officers did not put in an appearance.

"What is delaying them, I wonder?" asked Bob.

"Hard telling, Bob."

"I wish they'd come."

"So do I."

"It must be after midnight."

"So I should think."

Again there was silence for quite a while.

Still there was no sign of the two redcoats.

"Jove, can they have given up the idea of robbing the old miser?" asked Bob.

"I hardly thing so," was Dick's reply. "They were too greatly pleased with the idea. They need the money, to pay gambling debts with, and they will put in an appearance sooner or later."

"It is going to be later, I think, Dick," grumbled Bob.

"Have patience; they'll be along presently."

Then there was silence for another period that seemed an hour to the youths.

"I don't believe they're coming," said Bob, at length.

"I would be willing to wager anything that they will come," said Dick.

"Then what is keeping them?"

"You can't learn from me."

Presently, after another period of silence, Bob uttered an exclamation under his breath.

"I hear voices!" he half-whispered.

"And footsteps," added Dick.

"You are right."

"Yes; the thieves are coming at last."

"I think so, too."

"Yes, it would hardly be anybody else at this time of the night."

"That's what I think."

Then as the voices and footsteps sounded nearer, the two became silent, and listened eagerly.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps and voices, and then the youths made out two moving forms in the darkness. It was just possible to see that there was somebody there, and that was all.

"It is the British officers!" whispered Dick.

"Yes," replied Bob.

As the newcomers drew near the cabin they ceased talking, and walked more carefully, so as to make as little noise as possible.

They advanced to the cabin door, and tried it; the "Liberty Boys" heard the latch rattle.

The officers—for that was who they were—found the door fastened, of course, and both placed their shoulders against it, and pushed with all their might.

The door quivered and shook, for it was not very strong, but it held fairly well, and the two were forced to rest awhile, before trying a second time.

This time, instead of making a steady push, they threw their weight against the door suddenly and with terrible force, and the door gave way and went open with a crash.

There was a startled cry from within the cabin, followed by the query, in a trembling voice:

"Who is there?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE BRITISH OFFICERS IN TROUBLE.

"Never you mind who is here," was the reply, in a gruff voice.

"Who are you?" in a frightened voice. "Tell me who you are and what you want?"

"You'll find out soon enough, old man!"

"You are robbers!"

"Oh, pshaw. Stop guessing, old man, and be quiet."

A moment later a little blaze was seen, and one of the officers held a lighted candle in his hand.

Dick and Bob had stolen up close to the door, and looking in, saw the old miser cowering in one corner, where was a rude bunk, in which he had been sleeping when aroused by the breaking down of the door.

The two British officers were standing just within the room, and the miser's eyes were on them in a frightened gaze.

"Ha, redcoats!" exclaimed the miser, as he saw the red uniforms; "and officers, too. That means that I am to be robbed!—yes, robbed!"

"Why, are all British officers robbers, old man?" asked one of the two, sneeringly.

"All I have ever had any experience with have been," was the prompt reply.

"Ha, ha, ha! Say you so?"

"Yes, and that is why you are here to-night! I know you!—yes, I know you!"

"Oh, you do!"

"Yes, yes; you are all alike."

"Well, pretty much everybody is like somebody and most everybody is looking for gold, old man."

"But not everybody would rob in order to get gold, no, no! Not at all, not at all!"

"Perhaps not; but we are not here to discuss such notions. We are here for your gold, and we must have it. Where is it?"

"I have no gold, gentlemen; I assure you I have no gold!"

"Bah!" sneered the officer holding the candle; "that's a lie, false, and we know it as well as you do. You have gold, and lots of it."

"What makes you think an old man like me would have gold?"

"We were told that you have gold, much gold."

"Who told you such an infamous lie?" The old man's voice trembled with anger and fright commingled.

"Tory Jim told us."

"The scoundrel! That is just what might have been expected of him. But he lied!—yes, he lied. I have no gold. No, not a bit, not a bit!"

"That will do to tell, old man, but not to believe. We know you have gold, and we want you to tell where it is concealed."

"I have no gold, so cannot tell where it is concealed."

"Bosh! You cannot deceive us. You will have to tell us where the gold is concealed."

"I tell you that you are mistaken. I have no gold, I am poor—yes, very poor."

"Ha, ha, ha! Of course you would say so but you cannot make us believe that."

"It is true, gentlemen; yes, it is true."

One of the officers drew a rope from under his coat, and dangled it before the old man's eyes.

"Do you see this?" he asked, in a stern, threatening voice.

"Y-yes."

"Well, we will hang you with it if you don't tell us where your gold is hidden!"

"I have no gold, gentlemen. I assure you that I have no gold."

"You could keep on assuring us of that till you are black in the face, but it would do no good. We know better."

"Tory Jim gave us every assurance that you have no gold," from the other officer.

"Tory Jim lied; yes, he lied! He knows nothing about it; he was simply guessing."

"Bah! you can't make us believe that. You have no gold, and we must have it."

"Tell us where it is hidden," from the other officer.

"I assure you, gentlemen, that you are mistaken. I have no gold."

"Bosh!" interrupted the man with the candle. "You are lying, and you know it, and we know it—so save your breath and our patience."

"You are mistaken; I have no—"

"That will do," interrupting. "We will give you five minutes in which to make up your mind to reveal the hiding-place of your hoard, and then, if you still refuse to do so, we will hang you!"

The officer drew a watch from his pocket, and watched his hands, while the miser watched him, a look of terror on his face.

Dick and Bob, standing just outside the house, heard everything, and they felt sorry for the old man. It was evident that the loss of his gold would be a death-blow to him.

The youths did not approve of miserly qualities in any man, but they felt that the old man's gold was his own, and that he had a right to it, and was entitled to keep it; so they got ready to interfere as soon as the officers should make a move to offer violence to the old man.

Presently the officer slipped the watch back into his pocket.

"Time is up," he said; "now tell us where your gold is hidden."

The old man uttered a groan.

"I have no gold," he said, in a trembling voice. "I am sure you, gentlemen, that——"

"That will do!" sternly. "We have heard all of that sort of talk we care to listen to. You have the gold; you have it hidden somewhere near at hand—probably in the room in here. We will be able to find it, anyway, so you might as well tell us where it is, and save us the labor of hunting for it, and save your life at the same time—for if you don't tell, we shall most certainly hang you!"

"Surely you would not hang a helpless, inoffensive old man like me?"

"Surely we would, and will! Your only chance for life lies in your telling where your gold is concealed."

"I cannot tell you that, because I have no gold."

"Bosh!" Then to his companion: "Seize and hold him, while I place the rope around his neck. We'll hang him to that beam, there, right in his own cabin."

But before they could make a move to put their plan into execution, there came an interruption. Dick and Bob slipped through the open doorway and seized the two officers.

The redcoats were taken by surprise, and consequently were at a disadvantage, but they fought fiercely. They did not know who their assailants were, but supposed they were friends of the old miser.

The fear that they were to lose the chance to acquire a large sum of money caused the two to put up a desperate fight. They would not permit themselves to be overcome if they could help it.

The old man watched the combat with great eagerness. He realized that the newcomers were likely to be friends, since the redcoats were enemies and the strangers had attacked them. The candle had fallen to the floor, but continued to burn, thus making sufficient light so that all could see what they were doing. Dick, however, fearing the candle would be stepped on and extinguished, kicked

it out of the way, and the old miser picked it up, and held it.

"That's right, old man," said Dick. "Hold the light, and in a few minutes we will have these would-be robbers at our mercy."

"Yes, perhaps you will and perhaps you won't!" hissed one of the officers.

"There is no 'perhaps' about it," was the cool reply.

"You may find that you are mistaken."

"No danger," said Bob.

Then he and Dick put forth their best efforts, and having taken the two officers at a disadvantage in the first place, managed to throw them to the floor a few moments later, and sit on them.

"Now what do you think about it?" asked Dick.

"Blast you, we'll kill you for this!" cried one of the officers.

"It will do no good to threaten," was the calm reply.

"What are you going to do with us?" the other redcoat asked.

"You will learn soon."

Then the youths fastened the officers' hands together behind their backs, by using pieces of the rope the two had brought along to hang the old man with.

"There, they won't bother you any more, old man," said Dick.

"And I—I—hope you two gentlemen are not—not—robbers," said the miser, tremblingly.

"You need have no fears on that score," was the prompt reply. "We don't approve of hoarding up money just for the sake of having it to look at, but at the same time we are not robbers, and will not take your gold—though we could do so, if we wished, for we know where it is hidden."

"What?" almost screamed the old man. "You say you know where it is hidden? How did you find it out?"

"Ha, you old scoundrel, you said you didn't have any gold!" cried one of the officers; "and here you have acknowledged that you have."

"No, no; it is a mistake—I have no gold!" cried the old man. "You are mistaken, young gentlemen; I assure you that you are. I have no gold; I am poor, poor."

"That won't do, old man," said Bob. "We saw you, this evening, when you had the hiding-place of the bag of gold exposed. Yes, and we saw the bag itself, so there is no use of denying that you have it; and it is unnecessary, also, for we have no intention of taking your money."

"Oh, thank you!—thank you! I am glad to hear you say that."

"But we'll be back here and will take every bit of it," said one of the British officers. "Don't you forget that, you old rascal."

"And don't you be a bit afraid of their doing so, old man," said Dick. "They will not return to bother you. I will guarantee that."

"What are you going to do with us?" one of the redcoats asked.

"We are going to take you to the patriot encampment and turn you over to General Putnam."

"Blazes, but you must not do that! Say, free us, young fellows, and let's all four take the old man's gold and divide it equally between us."

"You don't know who you are talking to," said Dick, sternly. "You are wasting your breath."

"No, we do not know who we are talking to, that's a fact; but for special reasons we would like to know! Supposing you tell us?"

"What are your reasons for wishing to know?"

"We wish to know, so that we may know who to look for when we start out to get revenge on you."

"Very well. Then I will tell you who we are, so you will know who to look for."

"I dare you to do so."

"It requires no daring. We have no fears of such cowards as you two have proved yourselves to be. My name is Dick Slater, and my comrade's name is Bob Estabrook. We are members of a company of young men known as 'The Liberty Boys of '76.' Perhaps you have heard of us?"

CHAPTER XIII.

PURSuing THE REDCOATS.

It was evident that the officers had heard of the youths. They uttered exclamations and stared at them in open-eyed wonder and amazement.

"Dick Slater!"

"Bob Estabrook!"

Each gasped out a name, and then they were silent for a few moments, while they stared at the youths with interest.

"And you are members of the company of 'Liberty Boys'?" exclaimed one presently.

"We are; but come, we have no more time to fool away. We must be going."

"Let's gag them first, Dick," said Bob. "They'll yell as we are passing the British encampment, if we don't, and bring some of their comrades to their rescue."

"Well thought of, Bob. We'll gag them."

"Don't do it," pleaded one of the officers. "We'll give our word of honor not to cry out."

"You might forget your having given your word of honor," said Dick, "and we do not wish to be a party to causing anyone to break such a promise."

And they stuffed a handkerchief into the mouth of each of the prisoners, and fastened it in by binding another over the top of it."

"Now we will go," said Dick. "Good-night, old man."

"Good-night, and thank you for what you have done for me," was the reply, in a relieved tone of voice. It was evident that the old miser would be glad when they were gone.

"You are welcome. But take my advice and spend some of your gold for food and clothing for yourself, and some for the good of the poor people of the vicinity; if you don't do this it will probably be stolen from you, and I am almost sure that it ought to be. You should not hoard such stuff up, and worship it. It is a sin."

But it was plain to be seen that this sort of logic did not appeal to the miser. Gold was his god, and he worshipped it.

Then Dick and Bob each took hold of an arm of one of the officers, and led the two out of doors and out to the road.

"Now, mind you, no attempting to escape," said Dick, warningly. "If you do, it will go hard with you, for we shall hit you on the jaw so hard as to make you think a mule has kicked you. You have got to go to the patriot encampment with us, and there is no getting out of it."

The officers could make no reply, of course, being gagged; but it is safe to say that their thoughts were anything but pleasant.

The four walked along at a good pace, and managed to get safely past the point that was nearest the British encampment without being discovered; and twenty minutes later they entered the patriot camp, after having given the password to the sentinel who challenged them as they approached.

Not wishing, or thinking it necessary to arouse any body, just to let it be known that they had captured a couple of British officers, Dick and Bob tied the two prisoners' ankles, so they could not run away, and then spreading their blankets on the ground, placed the officers on them, and lay down on either side of the two. Soon they were asleep, and slept soundly till morning.

There was considerable excitement in the camp next morning when it was learned that Dick and Bob had captured two British officers, and a great crowd collected to look at the prisoners.

General Putnam sent for Dick, and the youth explained how it happened that they had made the capture.

"Well, well; you were in luck," he said. "I'm glad you did capture them, as it is always quite a blow to the enemy to lose some of their officers."

"True, sir; we are glad we succeeded in capturing the two."

The British evidently wondered what had become of the two officers. Doubtless their absence alarmed Governor Tryon, for he got his army started on the march quite early. He was anxious to get back to his headquarters at Kingsbridge, in Westchester County, New York.

But "Old Put." was not inclined to let the enemy go away scot free. He got his men started soon after the British were on the move, and kept close at their heels, and now and then his men succeeded in picking off a redcoat with their rifles, some of the men being good marksmen; and a number of laggards were made prisoners.

Along toward noon, Putnam divided his force, placing one-half under Dick Slater's command, and con-

manding the other half himself, the two forces moved swiftly forward, and to the right and left, and got on both flanks of the enemy.

A brisk fire was kept up, and a number of British soldiers were killed, and later on some more were captured. Then, about the middle of the afternoon, five wagonloads of plunder that had been taken from patriot homes back at Horseneck were captured.

This encouraged the patriot force greatly, and the men began to feel that they were more than getting even with the redcoats.

Governor Tryon was very angry, and he made an attempt to drive the patriots back; but while they were forced to give way, and retreat a ways, they returned to the work of harassing the British just as soon as the attack ceased.

This was kept up a while longer, and then General Putnam ordered that the pursuit be abandoned. They had gone far enough, he thought; and they had been very successful, too, and so he was satisfied. Thirty-eight prisoners had been captured, and five wagonloads of plunder that had been taken from the patriot homes in the vicinity of Horseneck.

"We have done well enough, and will return," he said. "I don't think the British have much to brag about, for we have certainly got even with them."

"That is the way it looks to me," coincided Dick.

Bob said the same.

"I think I shall not return to Horseneck with you, sir," said Dick.

"Nor I," from Bob.

"What will you do, then?" asked "Old Put."

"We will return to Washington's headquarters."

"Ah, very well; but I wish that you shall take a letter to the commander-in-chief, from me."

"We shall be glad to do that, sir, of course."

"I will order my men to go into camp here; we have done enough for one day, and in the morning we will set out on our return to Horseneck."

"We will stay here till after supper," said Dick. "If we were to follow the British too closely we might be captured."

"True. Well, that will give me time to write the letter."

The patriot soldiers were glad to go into camp, for they had been walking, running, and fighting all day, and were tired.

Putnam put in an hour writing a letter to the commander-in-chief. He told what he had just been doing, and what he expected to do in the future, and said he would attend to the matter the commander-in-chief had sent word to him to look after, by Dick and Bob.

The two "Liberty Boys" ate at the same camp-fire with General Putnam that evening, and the three had a very pleasant talk. The old veteran liked the youths, and he talked freely with them.

At last the "Liberty Boys" began making preparations

to start. Dick placed the letter to the commander-in-chief in the inside pocket of his coat, and when they were ready to mount and ride away, they shook hands with General Putnam, and bade him good-by.

"Good-by, boys; good-by," the old veteran said, earnestly. "I hope this will not be the last time we shall work together to bring about the defeat and discomfiture of the redcoats."

"I hope so, too, sir," said Dick.

"And I," from Bob.

Then they mounted their horses, and rode away out of the encampment. They were headed toward the west, the direction taken by the British army.

"Look out for the redcoats, boys," were the last words from "Old Put." "Don't let them capture you."

"We won't," was the reply. "We'll keep a sharp lookout for them."

Then they rode out of sight in the darkness, for it was now night.

"Well, how do you feel about our work with 'Old Put,' Dick?" asked Bob, as they galloped onward.

"Very well satisfied, Bob."

"And it is the same with me."

"I would have been a bit better satisfied had we got to him in time to warn him of the coming of the British, and thus kept him from being surprised at Horseneck."

"True. We were captured, however, and were unable to do so."

"Yes, and we might not have been free yet had it not been for Sophia Selby."

"That's so."

"Yes; and you mustn't forget to deliver that letter to her sweetheart, Harry Franklin, Bob."

"I'll not forget, Dick."

"He'll be tickled to get it, I'll wager."

"Yes, we know how that is ourselves, old man."

"So we do; it is a treat to us to get letters from Alice and Edith, isn't it?"

"It certainly is."

Dick and Bob were deeply in love with each other's sister, and there never were two sweeter girls than Alice Estabrook and Edith Slater. They were beautiful, bright, and tender-hearted and true, and were in every way worthy of the love the two brave "Liberty Boys" felt for them.

They rode onward at a gallop for more than an hour, and then they slackened speed somewhat. They were afraid they might run upon the British, and be captured.

They did not know but the enemy might be encamped right beside the road.

So they rode slowly, and kept a sharp lookout ahead for the light that would be made by campfires.

They were in Westchester County, New York, now, and within a few miles of the Hudson River.

"Say, Dick, let's go up home, and spend the rest of the night," said Bob.

"It will be quite a good way out of our way, Bob, and

I think we had better keep on going straight toward the commander-in-chief's headquarters," was the reply.

"All right; you are the boss."

The next moment they were given a surprise.

CHAPTER XIV.

BACK IN THE PATRIOT CAMP.

At least a dozen men had leaped out in the road in front of them, and then someone called out:

"Halt!"

The youths brought their horses to a stop, for they saw the men had pistols drawn and leveled. It was not so dark but that they could see this.

"What do you want, gentlemen?" asked Dick.

"We want to know who you fellows are?"

"A couple of travelers."

"Where are ye travelin' to?"

"New York."

"Do you live there?"

"Yes."

"Humph! Well, I am going to ask you to get down off them horses."

"What for?"

"I want to have a talk with you, and it is uncomfortable sitting up there, isn't it?"

"Not at all."

"Well, it's awkward for me to talk to ye while ye're settin' up there, so get down."

"Who are you fellows, anyway?" asked Dick. He saw they did not have on the British uniform, so guessed they were Tories.

"Ever hear tell of the Cowboys?"

Dick and Bob had. The Cowboys and Skinners were bands of men who roved around and robbed and pillaged the loyalists and patriots impartially, and often they committed murder.

"Are you Cowboys?" asked Dick.

"That is just what we are."

"Well, what do you want with us? We are in a great hurry to get home, and do not wish to be delayed any longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Oh, I s'pose ye don't, but that don't make any difference to us. We don't care anything about what you want."

"Oh, you don't?"

"No; we are runnin' this affair now, and I say for ye two fellers to get down off your horses."

But Dick and Bob had no intention of doing anything of the kind. Dick had managed to convey to Bob the knowledge that they were to make a sudden dash for it, and he was ready for action.

Suddenly Dick gave a signal, and the two spurred their horses forward, the animals responding quickly, for they

were not used to the feel of the spurs. So quick, indeed, was the action of the horses that the Cowboys did not have time to fire at the youths. Two or three of their number were knocked down, and they set up a terrible howling, one yelling out that his leg was broken.

Then the youths urged their horses onward at a gallop, and by the time the Cowboys could get straightened up and fire a volley they were well down the road, and pretty nearly out of range.

At any rate, only a few bullets carried to where they were, and these few did no damage.

On they dashed, keeping up the speed till they had gone perhaps half a mile, and then they slackened the speed again.

"That was a close call, Dick," said Bob.

"Yes, so it was; those scoundrels intended to rob us."

"That's just what they intended to do."

"Likely they would have taken our horses, too."

"You may be sure they would have done so; and we would have had to walk the rest of the way to the patriot encampment."

"We were too quick for them."

"You are right."

The youths met with no further adventure that night, and finally arrived at the patriot encampment in safety.

They went to the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys," and rolling up in their blankets, went to sleep.

They were up as early as anybody next morning, and when the rest of the "Liberty Boys" saw Dick and Bob among them once more they were delighted.

"Hello, where did you fellows come from?"

"When did you get here?"

"Where were you, anyway?"

"Did you have any adventures?"

"Did you see 'Old Put.?'?"

"Were you in a battle while you were away?"

"That will do," said Dick, laughingly. "We got back this morning, and we have had a very nice time. We saw 'Old Put.,' and were in a fight with the redcoats."

"Tell us all about it!" was the cry, and Dick said he would tell about the adventures of Bob and himself while they were eating breakfast.

He did so, and the youths listened eagerly. Many were the exclamations to the effect that they wished they had been there, and Dick and Bob told the youths that they wished many times that they had been with them.

"We would have worried the redcoats yesterday, while they were retreating, if you boys had been with us," said Dick.

"So we would," from Bob.

"Well, take us along next time," said Mark Morrison.

"Perhaps I may do so, Mark."

"Yes, yes; we would have given a good deal to have been with you yesterday," said Sam Sanderson.

After breakfast was over Dick went to headquarters to give "Old Put.'s" letter to the commander-in-chief, and to make his report.

Bob went in search of Harry Franklin, to give him the letter from his sweetheart, Sophia Selby.

General Washington gave Dick a pleasant greeting.

"When did you get back, Dick?" he asked, after shaking hands with the youth.

"In the night, sir—or rather, this morning."

"Did you find General Putnam?"

"Yes, sir."

"You delivered the message?"

"I did, your excellency."

"And what did Putnam say?"

"He said he would attend to the matter, sir."

"Good. How is everything over in that part of the country? Quiet, I suppose?"

"Not so very," smiled Dick. "We found General Putnam quite busy when we got there."

"Ah, indeed? Explain, Dick."

The youth did so, telling about the expedition of Governor Tryon, and how General Putnam had organized a force of militia and pursued the retreating enemy, and all about it.

General Washington listened with interest.

"Well, well," he said. "That was an unexpected move on the part of Governor Tryon."

"Yes, indeed," from Dick. "It took General Putnam by surprise, at any rate."

"Yes; but he rather evened up things afterward."

Then Dick produced the letter General Putnam had sent, and the commander-in-chief read it.

"Thank you for your good work in finding Putnam and delivering the message I sent him, Dick; and for bringing this letter and the news that you have imparted," said the general.

"I am glad if you are satisfied with my work, sir," was the modest reply.

"I am more than satisfied, Dick; I am delighted with your work, and when I have another difficult or dangerous assignment, I shall know who to give it to."

"Thank you, sir."

Then Dick saluted and withdrew.

Meanwhile Bob had found Harry Franklin. Bob was something of a tease, and after greeting Harry, he said: "I want to tell you a secret, old fellow."

"A secret, eh?" remarked Harry, who was a handsome, manly-looking young man

"Yes."

"Well, go ahead and tell it."

"I'm going to do so. You know Dick and I have just got back from a trip over into Connecticut?"

"Yes."

"Well, Harry—you won't tell anyone?" with a look around him.

"Of course not."

"All right, then; don't, for the boys would all laugh at me; but—I'm in love, old fellow."

"In love, Bob?"

"Yes, Harry. I found just the sweetest, prettiest little

girl over near New Rochelle that ever you saw in all your life, and I fell dead in love with her."

"You did, eh?" with an air of interest. "What is the girl's name?"

"Sophia Selby."

Bob said this in an innocent, matter-of-fact way, and Harry never for one moment suspected that he was being teased.

"What's that!" he cried, turning pale. "Did you say her name is Sophia Selby?"

"Yes; and I tell you she's a beauty, and sweet! Oh, you should see her, Harry! She's——"

"Where—does—she—live, Bob?" stammered Harry, his voice husky.

"On a farm not very far from New Rochelle, Harry."

"Tis she!" murmured Harry, huskily; and then he asked: "And did—do you—that is, do you think she—that she—cares for—you, Bob?" stammered poor Harry.

"Oh, yes," was Bob's offhand reply. "And by the way, Harry, she says she used to know you, and that there was a matter she wished to write to you about, and so she wrote a letter and sent it by me. Here it is," and Bob drew the letter from his pocket and handed it to Harry, who took it, almost reluctantly, staring at it the while, much as he would have looked at something that was to give him his deathblow. And in truth that was what he thought. It was his supposition that Sophia had written to tell him she no longer cared for him, and he hesitated to open the letter and receive the news which he felt was coming. Bob, who understood the matter, was almost sorry he had played the joke on the young man; but then he reasoned that when Harry read the contents of the letter he would be so immensely relieved and so extravagantly happy as to forgive him for the trick he had played.

"Open it," said Bob. "Read the letter, old man."

Harry tore the letter open, and when he had read the heading he gave a start, his face became suffused with a glow of happiness, and his eyes fairly dilated with joy.

He looked up and saw Bob standing there, grinning at him.

"Oh, you rascal!" he cried, and he made a sudden leap for the joker. Bob was too quick for him, however, and dodged out of the way, laughing all the time, fit to kill.

"Oh, what a joke!" he cried. "Harry, Harry! that's certainly the best joke that I have heard of lately!" and then he roared.

"You just wait," said Harry, shaking his fist at Bob. "I'll get a chance at you before long, and if I don't maul you it will be because I can't, that's all."

This made Bob laugh louder than ever; he saw that Harry was so relieved on account of finding that his sweetheart was still in love with him that he had no idea of holding enmity toward the author of the joke.

He read the letter through, then kissed it, placed it in his pocket and turned again to Bob, a happy smile on his face.

"Want to fight now, Harry?" grinned Bob.

"No, I'm too happy to want to fight, old man," was the reply. "But, jove! how you did scare me!"

"You were pale as a ghost, Harry."

"I felt pale, too, Bob."

"I don't doubt it, Harry; and I don't blame you, either, for Sophia is one of the sweetest girls I have ever seen, and you are a lucky chap to have her for a sweetheart."

"I know it, Bob."

Then Bob told how he and Dick had made Sophia's acquaintance, and as may well be supposed, Harry listened with intense interest.

"I'm glad you met her," he said. "I hadn't heard from her in two months."

"And you forgive me for the joke I had at your expense, old man?"

"Of course I do, Bob. And I owe you thanks for bringing me the letter."

"Don't speak of it, old fellow. It is what I know you would be only too glad to do for me under similar circumstances."

"That's true, Bob."

The joke was so good that Bob had to tell Dick about it.

Dick laughed, but said, somewhat soberly: "You'll get yourself soundly thrashed, one of these days."

But Bob only chuckled.

THE END.

The next number (126) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' BUGLE CALL, OR, THE PLOT TO POISON WASHINGTON," by Harry Moore.

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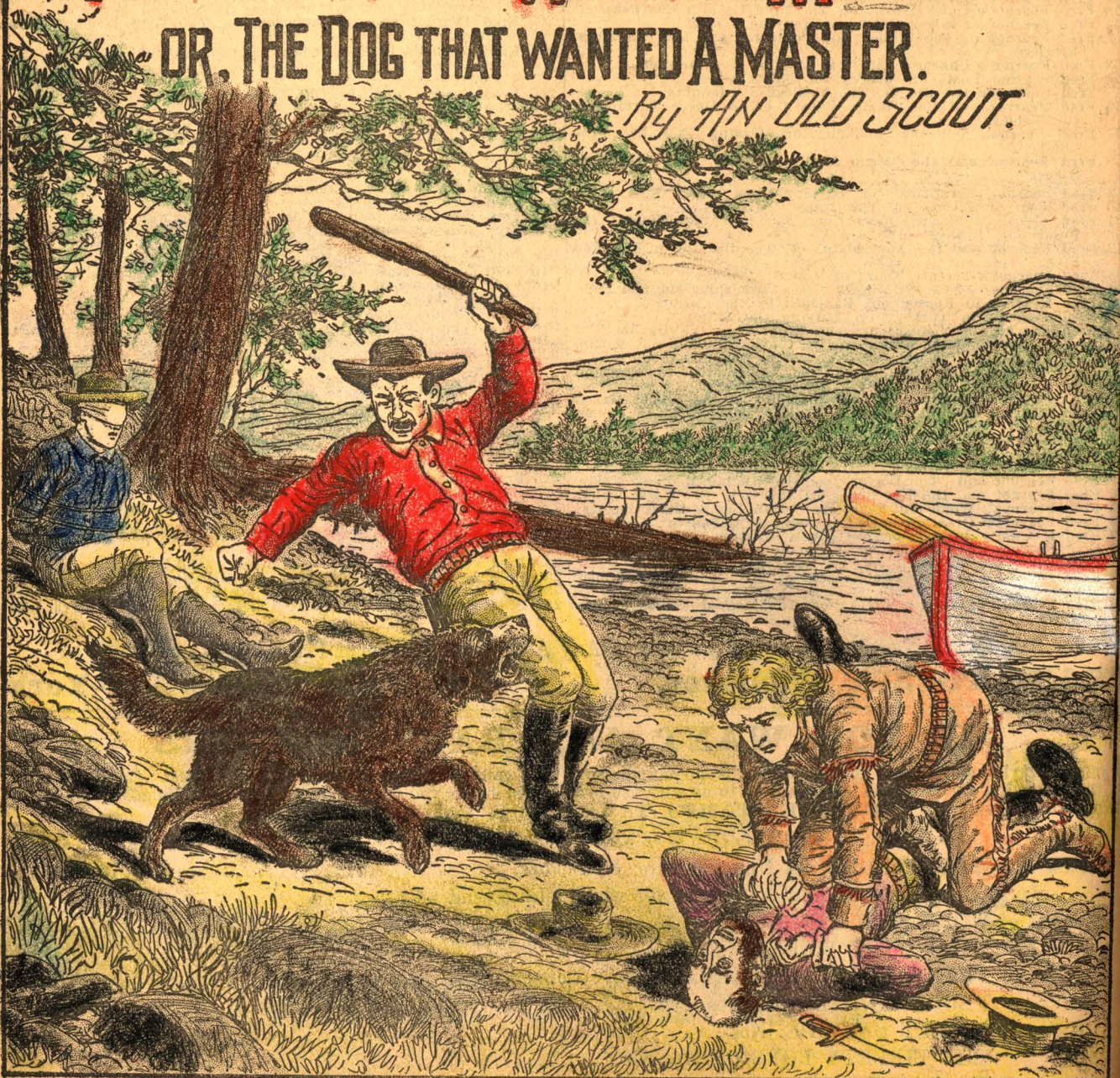
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